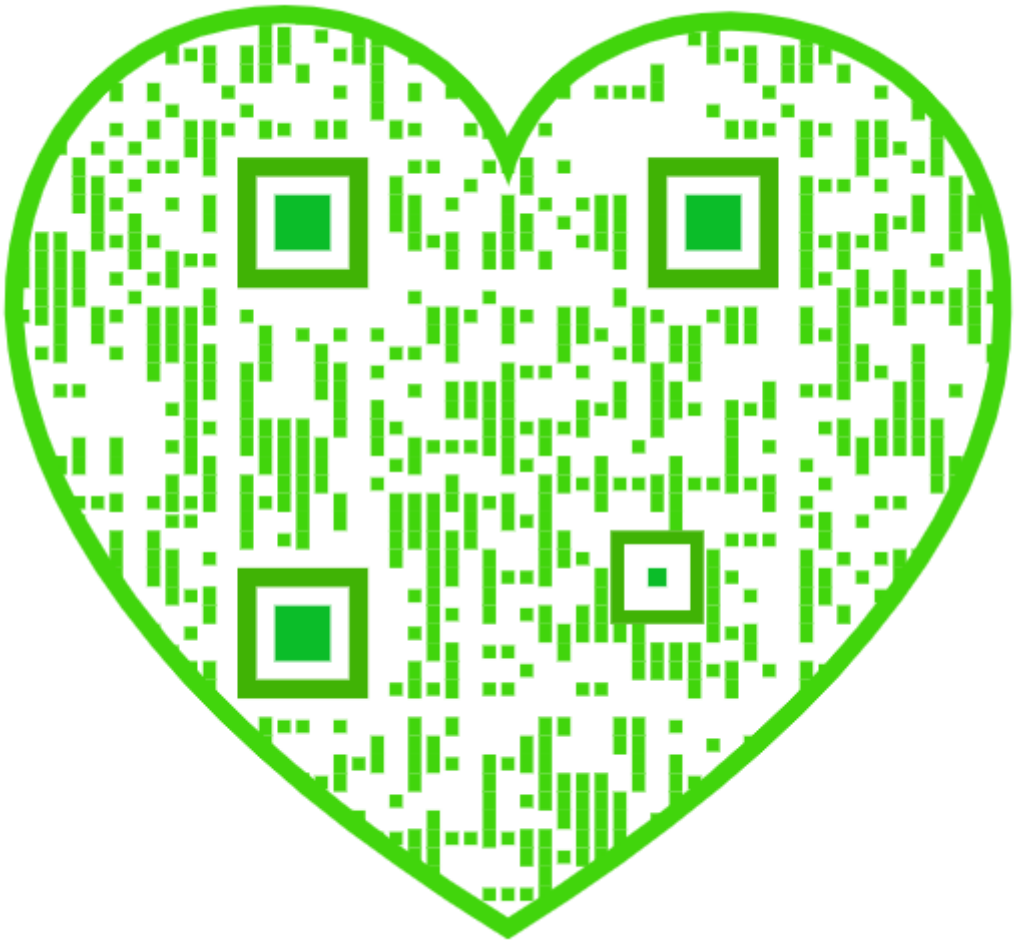

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"HE WAS ON THE EDGE OF THAT CLIFF"

(See page 264)

The Boy Scouts of Kendallville

By

BREWER CORCORAN

Author of

"The Road to Le Rêve," "The Barbarian," etc.

Illustrated by

CHARLES E. MEISTER

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TO

MY VERY GOOD FRIENDS

THE BOY SCOUTS

OF

VINEYARD HAVEN

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THE BOY SCOUTS OF KENDALLVILLE

CHAPTER I

MR. HALL SETS A TRAP

For the fourth time in three minutes the man in the oil-grimed apron glanced at the clock above the distant door. "About here," he announced, slamming the blued skeleton of an automatic pistol into a well-filled tray, "is where I call it a day."

"You could finish 'em all before the whistle."

"Sure! And I could make a hit with old Weinberg, if I could learn to live without sleep. Gallery play to the boss won't get you anywhere, Dick. You put in your little old eight hours per and you pull out your little old pink envelope Saturday noon, and the rest of the time you do your little old best to remember you're supposed to be human, and that Weinberg will look so when he's dead." He swept

his tools into the drawer and looked at the lad to his right. "Come on," he invited; "we've time to wash before she blows."

The youngster's lips became a straight line and his well-shaped head shook decisively as he picked up another piece of blued steel. "These guns may go to the trenches, Jim," he said in a low tone. "From the way the work's being rushed, I guess they're needed over there. I can't help thinking a few minutes of our time might mean some chap's life in France. Finish up that one. An automatic must be pretty handy when a man's poking a bayonet at you."

"If I had your imagination," stated the man, as he turned away, "I'd make up plays for the movies. About two more years at a bench and you'll begin to get wise you're only a part of a Kendall machine, and that all your brain's supposed to do is keep your ears from bumping together. But, before that, your kid ideas may get a lot of men in wrong. People have beaten the whistle for years; it's not up to you to queer a good game."

The boy's face flushed and he looked quickly up from his work. "I'm not queering any one's game, Jim," he asserted, "and, what's more, no one's going to queer mine. I may be working for the Kendalls but I'm my own boss in some things. You'll feel better when you've had something to eat." He laughed good-naturedly. "Eat a couple of suppers and you'll be ready to purr when someone scratches your ear."

The man looked back over his shoulder and an answering smile flashed across his keen face. "You're a good kid," he granted, "but, some day, someone'll forget to wait for the laugh at the end of your stump speech and bat you one."

"I'm not afraid of foul tips," chuckled the boy. "Good-night,— and don't eat your meat raw. Your bark's too fierce now."

"Night, Dickie. See you in the morning." He waved a hand which, a moment before, was almost a clenched fist, and hurried down the narrow aisle between the long row of work benches and whirring machines, growling, now and then, at men who

growled at him, for, from his progress toward the stairs, it was easy to see that Jim Scott was no general favorite among the hundred odd workers in the big department.

He had drifted into Kendallville with the flood tide which rose in response to the far-flung advertisements for skilled mechanics to augment the old force which had made the Kendall Arms Company famous for its pistols long before the Hun was ready to make his red gulp at Europe. Lean, wiry, aggressive, apparently as full of selfish ideas as a loaded Kendall is full of death, he made few friends and kept them fewer days. There was something about him which made the old conservative inhabitants of the New England village distrust him, and the majority of the new-comers were quick to see that the ideas and practices of the Kendalls were good, and that one who openly set out to run things according to his own lights was one whose light was apt to be extinguished suddenly and, therefore, not an attractive companion to be left with in the dark.

If any knew where Scott had learned his trade, or, where he came from last, they had not learned the news from him. Always ready to talk of any subject but himself, he asked no more confidence than he gave. That he was a good workman was beyond dispute; that he promised to become a disturbing influence in Kendallville was a well-grounded suspicion. Yet, in spite of the more or less mystery which hung over his past, there was a greater mystery in the fact that Dick Hall, generally so retiring and of so few words, appeared ready to be his friend.

Dick was well into his second year as a Kendall employee when Scott had put in an appearance, and been assigned to the next place at the long bench, where the pistol frames came from the machines, to have rough edges filed smooth. At first the other's chatter had disturbed him, yet, within the month, he had learned to hear it only as he heard the rasp and rumble of the machines at his back. But he heard other things more distinctly. Always ready to defend the under dog, he took Scott's grow-

ing unpopularity unto himself and his big, generous heart made the youngster go out of his way time after time to prove to Scott that he could have one friend in the factory, if he chose.

It bothered some of the old timers. Dick had been born in Kendallville. His father had been foreman of the very room in which the son now worked, and the day when failing health had made Tom Hall's resignation imperative had been a sad one for employer and employees alike. There wasn't an old workman who did not hope that the slender son, who came into the room a week after his departure, would broaden until he could fill the father's position in the plant as capably as he had endeavored to fill it as a wage earner. But they did not like his quiet acceptance of Jim Scott.

Not one, but several, of the men who had been with the Kendalls since the time when the Kendall .45 was the vital part of a plainsman's pack and the Kendall automatic a thing still undreamed of in "Bullet" Kendall's great brain, took it upon themselves to drop a quiet hint to the lad to see less of the

talkative new-comer. Dick took their hints as he took everything, calmly, and with a smile which seemed strangely unfathomable on the face of a boy still under eighteen.

Yet already the lad was learning to think for himself as well as how to work for others. It ages any boy to be snatched from a desk in a village high school and as abruptly deposited before a work bench, with the knowledge that the bread and butter for four people depends upon his ability to hold the new job. Dick had faced this change without the visible quiver of a lip. Grim necessity banished day dreams of a course at a technical school; loyalty to his invalid father and to his sister and younger brother drove all possible selfish considerations from his mind. If he had hoped to blaze an unknown trail, he settled as gamely into a wheelworn road, and he had the respect of all Kendallville for his grit, and the love of all Kendallville for his cheerfulness.

Bob Robinson, the tightest-mouthed old Englishman who ever served apprenticeship in Sheffield,

went far toward showing the attitude of the elders as he shut down his machine that night at the roar of the whistle and started for the wash room. "A day's work is a day's work," he said, as he shuffled past on tired feet, "and more than that is poor work."

"Just going to finish up this one," retorted Dick, without taking his eyes from the dull, blue steel.

"And there you're right, my lad. Finish what you start, but don't start what you're too weary to finish well." He stopped and squinted over the boy's shoulder. "Since when have you been finishing triggers?" he demanded gruffly.

Dick stiffened, but, the next instant, his eyes began to twinkle as he leaned further over his task. "Might have to do it some day," he answered evasively; "it's well to know how."

The old man snorted. "That slacker Scott's quit early and you're shielding him," he charged.

"It's not a question of shielding; it's a question of getting out the guns."

"And it's men like Scott who ought to be made

to face them," growled Robinson. "I know the breed. It's short shift they're giving them in the old country this day. 'Tis time we over here learned that trade as well. Leave be, boy!"

"Sure!" Dick's grin was cheerful now and, as he straightened, he dropped the finished part into its box on Scott's bench, then wiped his hands on a bit of waste. "Gee, but I'll be glad to get home! I'm hungry. Can I go along with you?"

The old mechanic puffed out his cheeks, inclined at first, to be a bit stuffy because the lad had neglected his advice; but then he caught the broader view, and his red face grew even redder. "'Tis come to a pretty pass when babes teach their elders," he grumbled. "Come, Richard; you're Tom's own boy and I'd like to break a cane over your back. But let Scott be the slacker, I say. Even a dog's known by the company he keeps." Together they left the shop.

"Hello, Dickie!" greeted a good-looking youngster, slapping the broad back as he rushed past. "See you later?"

"Not to-night, Jim. Going to stay home with Pop."

"All right," he called cheerily. "We'll get you some day. You can't keep out from where you belong."

"Young Farnsworth running loose nights and trying to get you into pool rooms with him?" demanded Mr. Robinson, fiercely.

"Jimmie's not that sort."

"Then what's he mean by trying to lure you out?" he insisted, his natural suspicion far from satisfied.

"Oh, it's just one of his kid jokes, I guess. He's been picking on me to join some Boy Scouts."

"Never heard of 'em."

"It's an organization founded by a fellow countryman of yours, Mr. Robinson,— General Baden Powell."

"Then it's a little bit of all right," declared the man promptly, "and you join right quick."

"I'll think it over," promised Dick, doing his level best to keep his face straight. But stolid Mr.

Robinson saw no joke. His loyalty to the old country was too deep to permit that, and, all the way to the Hall cottage, he spun yarns about the deeds of B. P. in South Africa and of the English army all over the world.

Dick, in spite of his interest, was not sorry to bid the slow-moving mechanic good night and his pace quickened as he hurried up the short path to the steps, humming softly to himself and already beginning to feel rested.

Even as he opened the door, he heard a gay call from the kitchen, and, the next moment, his sister was shaking a reproving finger at him. "You're late, Dick," she charged, "and it's your fault if supper's spoiled."

"If that's all I ever have to worry about," he laughed, throwing off his coat and giving her rosy cheek a pat as he pushed past to wash his face and hands again, "I'm going to have a calm and placid life. You're some cook, Sally! How's Pop, this evening?"

"Still the same lazy good-for-nothing," an-

swered a cheery voice from the little front room. "Anything new at the factory?"

"Nothing but another rumor of more hands."

"Bullet's certainly doing his bit to help the right side," said the voice wistfully. "Wish I could do my share."

"Mr. Kendall asked after you to-day," announced the boy quickly.

"Which one?"

"Mr. Stephen."

"There's a man worth molding yourself after, Dick."

"So I've heard you say," chuckled the son. "Scared me to death, though. I always expect to be fired when he stops to say something. He barks like one of his own guns. I'd rather have old 'Bullet' stalking round."

"They're both strong men," stated the father firmly, "fair, square and on the job, and they want their people the same."

The boy came to the doorway, the towel still in his hand. "What's the matter, Pop?" he asked;

"losing your sense of humor, or am I really leading your pet goat round on a string?"

The thin, white father half turned in the invalid's chair and looked up into the dancing brown eyes of his handsome, well-built boy. "Any time you get my goat, kid, you tie a bell on it and pin a medal on your swelled out chest," advised Mr. Hall solemnly. "Are you going to push me in to supper, or leave me here to starve to death?"

"If I take you in, will you promise not to tell any stories about Steve Kendall?"

"But Sally likes 'em. Sally's a young woman of excellent taste."

"Sally's a young woman who's cooked an excellent supper that's losing all its taste," called the girl from the kitchen. "You two stop fighting and come along."

"Now will you be good, Pop?"

"Looks 'sif we'd have to be, son. No wise man invites troubles with the cook. Guess I can walk to-night."

"Guess you won't try," vetoed the youngster and

with that he caught the back of the chair and pushed it gently to the supper table. "Where's the kid?" he demanded, glancing at his sister.

"Reading, I suppose. Nelson!"

"In a minute," agreed a muffled voice.

"Where's he hiding this time?"

"Bedroom, I guess. He offered to help me with the pudding, but all he'd do was eat currants and I shooed him out."

"Come on, Nelse!"

"Yes, sir." The reply was prompt and the boy came running in, his eyes sparkling. "Some story!" he announced. "That guy Stevenson was no piker when it came to describing a pirate."

"Glad to hear he's improving your English, youngster," suggested the father.

"Everybody pick on little Nelson!" exclaimed the boy. "Go ahead; I'll get even on that meat. About three slices, Dick, and then let Sis see how much potato she dares decorate it with."

"I envy you that appetite," declared Mr. Hall. "I've forgotten what it is to be hungry."

"I'm sorry, father; I do the best —"

"Stop right there, Sister," he commanded. "You're the best little cook who ever happened, and everything you make is fine."

"Certainly is," agreed Dick promptly.

"And, if you don't believe I'm on that band wagon," chimed in Nelson, "just test me with a dash more of that potato."

The girl flushed with delight, for there was no more mistaking the sincerity of their praise than there was danger in overlooking their steadfast loyalty to her. And, in this, she was like the rest. No one could suggest criticism of a Hall to a Hall. They might joke and scold and tease each other, but that was as much jealously guarded family privilege as it was a prominent family characteristic.

The latter was well proved during the remainder of the meal, and Nelson and his untamed appetite were the chief sufferers. To have heard the father enter into the fun, one never would have dreamed that he knew his days were numbered, or was conscious that the world contained such a thing as

suffering. Since the death of his wife, when Nelson was a baby, and especially since his own collapse two years before, he had tried his best to live for his children and for them alone he clung to the slender thread of life.

Of the four, he alone had to make pretense of eating, and, while they watched him covertly, none referred to his lack of appetite until all three were through. Then Nelson, gulping a last mouthful of pudding with a mighty effort, leaned back in his chair and folded his hands across his stomach. "When Pop's through gorging himself, Sis, wake me up," he suggested and promptly began to snore.

"Just going to have one more dab, boy."

"Not another bit," the girl stated sternly, playing a game too long familiar to be pathetic now; "you've eaten too much already. Run along into the other room, Nelse, and I'll do the dishes."

Two disgusted snores came in instant protest, yet, before Dick could move the invalid's chair from the table, little Nelse had his hands full of dishes and was as busy as a contented bee.

The elder son moved the father back into the front room and lit the lamp on the round center table. "Feelin' any better this evening?"

"'Bout as well as I ever will, old man," came the unexpected answer in even tones. "I'm a bad drag on a lad your age, but the two youngsters need me awhile longer."

"Don't!" he cried chokingly.

"I'm not going to quit, Dick; I'm not that sort. It isn't in a Hall. But you asked me and neither of us is afraid of the truth."

"Of course you're not going to quit," he asserted gamely. "But don't ever say you're a drag. I owe you everything I have and I'm doing what little I can to repay you, now that I have the chance."

"You've done that a thousandfold. You're growing into the kind of man your mother knew you'd be. She was worth working for, Dickie."

"So are you," he said huskily; "so are the kids. I wish she could see them now."

"Perhaps she can," murmured the father. "So long as we all live straight lives, I believe she can.

By the way, Nelson's school report fell off this month. He isn't getting into bad company, is he?"

"Not that I've heard of. I'll look round a bit more carefully to-morrow. There're a lot of new boys in town,— came with the new gangs at the plant."

"Keep your eye on him; I can't,— not that way, you know."

"There ought to be some better way of watching that whole young crowd," said Dick thoughtfully. "Why don't you put it up to Mr. Kendall the next time he comes to see you? He's usually ready to lend a hand in anything of that sort."

"I was talking about it this afternoon with Mr. Tregressor."

"That new minister?"

"Ah-ah! He's a good deal of a man, too,— human all the way through. And he understands other people's troubles because he's been through trouble himself. He's a Canadian and one son's been killed at the front already, while another is on the way home, crippled for life."

"Oh!"

The man nodded thoughtfully. "I know how young Tregressor's going to feel," he began.

"Please, let's talk of something else. You did your bit with General Miles in Porto Rico, and you gave your health to your country. I'm as proud of that as if they'd given you the Medal of Honor. But we're not going to discuss it; it's happened, and that's all there is to it."

The father glanced up. "Going to keep the old man cheerful, are you?" he said. "Good! I'll help you. Toss me that book and I'll read myself into a better mood."

Dick did not hand him the book, but said:

"Let me read to you."

"Couldn't think of it."

"Haven't a thing to do."

"Sure?"

"Absolutely."

"Not a thing?"

"Not a thing."

"Fine! Then put on your hat and coat and run

up to Mr. Tregressor's. I told him you'd be up there this evening."

"You set a trap for me," declared the boy, smiling in spite of himself.

"And you fell into it head first. Go along; I want to read."

"But why should I go? I never go anywhere."

"That's the first reason; the second's that Mr. Tregressor wants to see you."

"Why?"

Mr. Hall picked up his book, opened it, then peered over the top. "If I had your curiosity," he chuckled, "I'd go ask him."

"If I had your disposition," laughed the boy, as he rose and laid his hand on the feeble shoulder for an instant, "I'd — I'd —"

"You'd what?"

"I'd ask for nothing else in this world," blurted Dick and ran out of the room.

CHAPTER II

A GOOD DEED

As Dick came out into the cold, spring night, the smile faded from his lips and he began to suspect that his father had had a far more definite purpose than mere whim in sending him to see Mr. Tregressor. Yet, try as he would, he could not discover any explanation for his mission. He knew the minister by sight. From the first there had been something strangely appealing in the calm, strong face and the straight and upright bearing of the stocky, broad-shouldered man who had a nod and a cheerful word for all. But Dick was not one to force acquaintanceship, and Mr. Tregressor apparently had had other things to do besides halting hurrying boys on their way to and from work.

His curiosity became so sharpened that it crowded other thoughts from his mind, and, for once, he walked with head bowed and eyes fixed on the snow.

Only an amused chuckle close to his ear brought him back to realities, and the knowledge that Jim Scott had fallen into step at his side. "Say!" he exclaimed, "bray louder next time and don't scare a chap out of a year's growth."

"Quit walking in your sleep, or you'll get run over by a steam roller some day," advised Jim. "Why the big bluff at making people think you're thinking?"

"I sure was in a trance!" Dick agreed. "If you hadn't come along, I'd probably have been run in for blocking traffic at the corner."

"You find any traffic to block in this hole-in-the-ground and I'll pin a medal on you. This is the deadest village that ever escaped being put on a map."

"Then why stick round?"

The man looked at him quizzically, then shrugged his shoulders. "I've got to eat," he offered, "and, to eat, I've got to work. The working's plentier than the eating here, but I guess I'll stick round awhile longer. If they had sense enough to start

a union here, we men would come nearer getting what's coming to us, and that Kendall bunch wouldn't throw out their chests so far."

"Don't think they object to unions; they pay more than union scale, anyway. I don't believe you'll find better folks to work for anywhere in the United States."

"Oh, you moss-backs all talk that way," said Scott disgustedly. "It's because you don't know what you want."

"I know what you want," retorted Dick good-naturedly, "and that's a punching bag in front of you all the time. Don't you ever get sick of kicking?"

Again the man glanced at him out of the corner of his eyes. Then his whole attitude changed. "Guess not," he said carelessly; "it's good exercise and sometimes turns into a good game."

"What do you mean?"

"Nothin' much. Where you headed?"

"Going up on the hill to see Mr. Tregressor."

"Don't know him."

"Neither do I."

"Then why do it? Come on and take in the movies."

"Have to save the pennies up my way."

"My treat."

"Much obliged. Made it a rule to accept nothing I can't afford to return. Understand, don't you, old fellow?"

"As much as I do a lot of your other crazy ideas, youngster. You might break over, to keep me from hating myself alone."

Dick shook his head. "Nothing doing!" he repeated as they rounded the main corner of the town.

"Hello, Dick!" a man of about thirty called, as he recognized the boy and stepped out of the crowd hovering before the door of a pool and news room. "What's brought you down town?"

"Hello!" the boy responded cordially. "I'm passing through your city."

"Better stop over a couple of trains. We people," he went on, nodding to the rest in front of the store, "are going to shoot a game of pool. Don't

suppose it would do us any good to ask you?"

"Does me a lot of good to have you think of it, but I can't."

"Let me in?" suggested Scott. "I invented that game."

Harry Lane looked at him a second time. It was plain to see that he was not wildly enthusiastic. "It's an open game," he said; "if you want to take a chance, come to it."

"So long, then!" called Dick, as he went on. "See you both in the morning."

"What's the matter with that kid?" demanded Scott, as he turned toward the store.

"No one round here ever found anything the matter with him. If he doesn't want to hang round a pool room with us loafers, though, that's our hard luck. Dick Hall's a corker and don't you make any bad bets against that."

"It was no reason for his acting so bloomin' superior."

"Say, look here; you came to Kendallville on your own invitation and you went to work for the

Kendalls because you were the one to ask for a job and you're coming in here on your own bid, not ours. The rest's up to you. Get me?"

"Sure! Some day you'll wake up. Until then, I'll take my naps alone at the movies. I don't horn in where I'm not wanted."

"Suit yourself; I was going out of my way to be decent to a friend of Dick's." Without another word he went inside, leaving Scott to find amusement where he chose. But it was not at the movies.

As Dick left the main thoroughfare for a darker street, his steps began to lag and he caught himself wondering how he was going to begin a conversation with a man he'd never spoken to. Yet scarcely had he rung the Tregressors' bell, and stepped inside the quickly opened door, before he found himself shaking hands with the white-haired man, and asserting that he was glad to be there.

"The evening's little more than a baby, Hall," the man said, with a smile which seemed to bubble from the depths of clear, deep-seeing blue eyes,

" so come into my study and we'll let it grow a bit older, while we get acquainted. I've wanted to know your father's son for some time. I'm feeling especially partial toward sons to-night; I've just had a wire that my own boy has reached Montreal and is coming to see me as fast as the trains will bring him."

" Is that the one who's been in the trenches? "

" The one who was there and who has come back."

" I know about the other one. Father told me."

The minister held open the door while the youngster passed into the cosy, lamp-lit study. " Did he? I'm glad of that. He was a good son and a good soldier. No man could ask that more be said of him. But so's this old fellow who's coming home," he added in a tone which astounded Dick, used as he was to cheerfulness and bravery. " You'll like Dal. There never lived a cleaner sportsman."

" Will he stay long? " The question was more to cover his feeling of awkwardness over being in a strange house than for any other reason. Even as

he asked it, his host nodded toward a chair and Dick sank into it as if it was a sure refuge from embarrassment.

"Can't say. He's never been much for idling, but he's earned a rest during these last two years. I hope he'll stay; possibly he'll find work here. A man with but one arm is of no further use at the front. Dal will enjoy your father; old soldiers love to spin their yarns."

"But father's service in Porto Rico was a small thing compared to what your son has been through, sir."

"No service is small, my boy, when it is done with a whole heart for one's country."

"Oh, I didn't mean that!" cried Dick, thoroughly uncomfortable at being misunderstood. "I meant that father'd have to do all the listening. He didn't see any real fighting, you know. It was the climate and the fever which broke him."

"He took his chance, like any other brave man would, and he's paying the cost, like every true man does — without a whimper. His life here in Ken-

dallville is a better sermon than I'll ever preach, my boy. You can't put self-sacrifice and true unselfishness into mere words."

"I guess that's right," Dick agreed, looking at the man in the big chair across the book-littered table, with big, honest, brown eyes, "I guess, when you come to figure things down as far as they'll go, unselfishness is the biggest thing in the world."

"It's seemed so to me during the forty years I've been preaching it. But I didn't ask you here for this but—" He stopped abruptly and a pleased smile flashed across his thin lips. "That's the bell," he exclaimed, springing to his feet and starting for the door. "It must be some of my youngsters. They usually turn up about this time, when they can't find anything better to do."

Dick, surprised at the change which had come over him, and, marveling at his almost boyish haste, rose, too, and stood by the table, uncomfortably shifting from one foot to the other. In the hall, he heard excited babblings and the booming of the bass voice above the boyish trebles; then, into the room,

piled four excited boys of about fifteen, followed by the beaming Mr. Tregressor.

"And here," proclaimed Jimmie Farnsworth, stopping abruptly, "is the leading citizen who couldn't get out to-night! How-do-do and hello, Dick. Did you change your mind when you changed to your best coat?"

"Dick Hall!" mumbled little Ned West. "Dick Hall!"

"I'll vote that Mr. Tregressor caught him in one of those traps he was explaining last week," exclaimed Nick Root, the incorrigible.

"You're wrong, Nick," contradicted Mr. Tregressor, as he pushed Hal Winslow toward a convenient chair and turned to close the door. "All I did was to be conceited enough to think I'd make good bait for your trap. I've lured him here; it's you fellows' work to catch him."

Dick looked from one pleased face to another and a helpless grin began to crinkle the corners of his mouth. "I seem to be it," he acknowledged, "but I don't get the answer."

"We're the ones who're going to get that," declared Nick. "You sit down in that chair and don't say 'yes' till I snap my fingers."

"All you do, Nick," asserted Jim Farnsworth, "is to go into that corner before you're put there and, when you get there, keep quiet. Dick's a wily bird and the sort of noise you make would scare a flock of crows."

"Why not let Mr. Tregressor talk?" suggested West mildly. "He can say it better than we can."

"Which same is a fine compliment — not!" snorted Nick disgustedly.

"It's Jim's work," stated Mr. Tregressor, crossing to his own chair and looking about the room contentedly. "I'm going to take a back seat so that Nick won't be lonely."

"My modesty's always bringing me some reward," grinned Nick. "Begin the big talk, Jimmie, and I'll applaud just where you made me promise to."

"You'll keep still,— and that's a command," retorted Jimmie.

"Yes, Jim," Nick, instantly serious, added to Dick's wonderment.

"You see," began Jim slowly, turning toward Dick. "Mr. Tregressor had the idea that some of us fellows were not making as much of ourselves as we might and he invited us four up to supper one night and explained the Boy Scouts and, the more he explained, the more of a hit it made with us. Here were we chaps, living within half an hour's walk of the woods, and knowing nothing about them, except where the swimming hole is and when chestnuts ought to be ripe. Then, the next Saturday, he took us on a hike and showed us how we thought we'd seen things, but really hadn't had our eyes open. And he cooked us the bulliest dinner over a regular camp fire and taught us how to do it, too."

"Only everything you cooked the next week tasted like hard boiled smoke," threw in Nick.

"It was all right the time after," declared Jim belligerently. "We've certainly learned a lot about camping, Dick. And we organized a Scout patrol,

Mr. Tregressor got a commission as our scout master and Hank Winn and Ted Field joined. That gave us full membership and we got to work on the real part of Scouting, which is learning how to be prepared for everything. We meet here once a week. You wouldn't come when I asked you to," he finished in a hurt voice, "but we want you to join."

"But you just said your membership was full, Jim."

"Our patrol is full, but we want you to start a new one," burst out Ned West, and then turned scarlet because every one remained silent.

It was Dick's turn to take a long breath now. He liked these boys, even though they were all younger, and he liked Mr. Tregressor more than he had ever supposed he would come to like a man in so short a time. "'Fraid I'm too old," he offered, desperate.

"No boy is too old to be a Scout and no man is too old to live up to Scout law," said Mr. Tregressor quietly. "Don't make an over-hasty decision, Dick. We're all in earnest in asking you to do this. You

can bring in the older fellows by forming a patrol of your own."

"They might join if *you* asked 'em; they wouldn't for me."

The man smiled. "It wouldn't hurt you to try, would it?" he asked.

"I don't suppose it would," acknowledged the boy slowly. "But, honestly, I haven't time to go out in the woods. I have to work, and, when I'm not in the shop, I like to hang round with father and the kids. I've never joined anything. Saturday afternoons are about my only holidays and I've always played ball then when I could. I'd hate to give that up. It sounds selfish, I know, but I love baseball and I don't care much about the woods, except when there's a brook," he added.

"You give up ball and there'd be a riot in town," prophesied Nick. "As for the woods, you don't like 'em because you don't know 'em. I used to look for bears every time I heard a twig snap, and, as for meetin' a rabbit face to face — not for mine! Now I can imitate three birds."

"One of 'em's a parrot," stated Jim. "If you want to air any more of your personal history, wig-wag it."

"You couldn't read it, if I did: I'm too fast for you."

"You're not. I taught you the code."

"Then catch this." Nick was on his feet in a flash. His arms began to swing, up, down, up down, first right, then to the left, then poising, hesitating, sweeping in the clean-cut arcs of the two-arm semaphore code. For a moment Jim Farnsworth followed him intently but then turned to Mr. Tregressor, a foolish smile playing around the corners of his mouth. "Is it real?" he asked.

The man's glance was fixed on the rapidly flying arms but he nodded slightly, as if too intent to answer in any other way. An instant later the arms stopped, and Nick, snapping his hand to his forehead in salute, sat down, his eyes dancing.

"Fine work!" Mr. Tregressor exclaimed. "Fine!" Then, turning to the sheepish patrol leader he decoded the message. "'Signal,'" he

snapped; "'Don't boast until you can make good!'"

"I'm it," announced Jim, heartily. "That certainly was shooting it some, Nick. You put it all over me."

"Do you mean to say that he was talking with his arms?" asked Dick. "Did all that Indian club business mean something to you people?"

"It certainly did to Mr. Tregressor and it should have to the rest of us," confessed Jim, "only it came a bit too fast. That was really flag signaling, only Nick did it with his arms, instead of flags."

"Who taught him?"

"Mr. Tregressor. Nick's specializing in signaling now, so's to get the Scout merit badge for it. It's only one of the thirty or forty phases of real Scouting."

"What are some of the others?"

"Woodcraft, scholarship, civics, first aid, lifesaving, mechanics, athletics."

"Hold on," begged Dick. "You lads haven't learned all about all those things."

"'Course we haven't. But we may in time. Each one of us specializes."

"That signal stuff appeals to me," confessed Dick. "A couple of fellows could have a lot of fun with that."

"It might come in very useful some time, too," threw in Mr. Tregressor; "most things Scouts learn have a way of coming in handy at unexpected moments. You could pick it up very quickly, Dick. But, after all, it's a very minor phase of real Scouting; it's only one little strand in the big rope which means 'Be Prepared.'"

"I guess it's about all I'd have time for, if I went into the thing," mused the boy. "Honestly, seeing Nick do that makes me jealous!"

"I'll be glad to teach you what I know," offered Nick, suddenly modest. "It's not very hard, or I'd never have learned it. I'm ivory above the eyebrows."

"He isn't boasting now," chuckled Jimmie.

Nick glared at him. Dick, who had known the hot-headed youngster all his life, expected an out-

burst. But, instead, Nick winked solemnly. "He hasn't learned that there's a merit badge for 'Safety First' or he'd never have risked that. But, seriously, Scouting has helped me to quit boasting."

"It seems to do all sorts of things," exclaimed Dick. "There must be something behind what you fellows have said, though. Suppose you let Mr. Tregressor talk. If I couldn't go in for it, maybe you'd let Nelson have a chance. The kid needs just this sort of thing."

"I'll be glad to tell you all I can," agreed Mr. Tregressor, and straightway began a brief account of how General Baden Powell founded the Boy Scouts and how the movement spread to America, grew and flourished. Then he described the organization and aim of the Scouts and told of the Scout Law and object and, above all else, how every Scout thinks of others before he thinks of himself and tries so to shape his life that he can look every man and boy squarely in the eye. "And," he concluded, "if there ever was a boy who wouldn't have to

change his ways in order to live up to our ideals, it's you, Dick Hall. We need you."

For a long minute there was silence and the five watched the set and crimson face of the boy they hoped would give them his aid. Dick's mind was turning over many things, and, now and then, his teeth closed on his under lip. At last he looked up and his eyes met the steady gaze of Mr. Tregressor. "If I can be of any use to any one," he said slowly, "I don't see how I could honestly refuse to do my part."

"Then you'll come in and organize a patrol of your own?"

"I'll do my best, Jim."

"Wow!" triumphed Nick Root. "This is where we four have done one good deed for to-day."

CHAPTER III

SOMETHING IS STOLEN

As Dick went home that night, his mind was busier with this strange signaling of which Nick, notoriously the laziest boy in the crowd, had proved himself master, than with the more important features of Scouting. It had touched some chord within him; he wanted to learn the code Nick had so valiantly tried to explain. But, later, came a different feeling, almost a sensation of guilt at having impulsively given his word to undertake something which was bound to make grave inroads into the time he gave to his home. But, before he had a chance to become confused in his thoughts, his father wormed the whole story from him, and, to Dick's vast relief, was enthusiastic in his approval and the boy began to study the flags that very night.

His father's endorsement gave the spur needed to overcome his innate modesty about approaching

others with a proposition already growing close to his heart. And, although his manner was strangely diffident when he began to talk with Ted Knight and Bud Carter, two of the fellows Mr. Tregressor had asked him to see, his enthusiasm soon overcame his discomfort, and, "playing up" the advantages and fun they all might have after learning the code, he won them over, not only to that, but to the greater thing — that Scouting offered a background against which character might be built.

Together they went to the fourth boy, but in Billy Defoe they met a tartar. Try as they would they could not make him take their arguments seriously. "I'll do most anything for you fellows," he offered, "but I want something with more kick than this. Besides, I'm not geen on Tregressor. First thing I knew, he'd want me to lay off having any fun."

They tried him three or four times, for he was far from being as unreasonable as he made himself out, and they all liked him. But when the others gave up in despair, Dick became the more determined to succeed.

The problem became so interesting that he not only talked it over with Mr. Tregressor, but began to try out his arguments on Scott, and Jim, always ready to discuss any topic on earth, entered into the spirit of the debate, and, as he worked, seemed to enjoy thoroughly trying to tangle the boy in his explanations and confuse him in his statements.

It became almost a game, and they were at it in full swing one afternoon, their tongues going at the same time, although their eyes and fingers were busy with their work. It was because of this that the usually alert Scott did not notice that quickened atmosphere which discloses the presence of one of the powers-that-be in every mill.

Down the aisle came a man of about thirty-five, his step neither fast nor slow, his eyes never still. The older workmen nodded gravely as he passed and in their greeting was both respect and a frank show of friendliness. But the newer men bent further over their work, as if to impress him with their industry, and it was on one of them that his keen, all-seeing glance rested longest.

With only an occasional stop to examine some piece of work, he came on, until directly behind the chattering pair. A quick frown flashed across his high forehead as he caught snatches of their conversation and became aware that it was entirely foreign to the factory. His head turned, as if looking for Weinberg, the foreman, but the next moment he stepped forward, and touched Dick on the arm.

"Let's see that frame you're working on, Hall," he said, in an absolutely emotionless voice.

Dick jumped at the touch, turned, and, when he recognized the younger Mr. Kendall, nodded brightly. Almost in one motion, he drew it across his apron to remove the last trace of oil, and held it out. "It's nice steel," he volunteered, "and they're cutting so clean on the machines now that it makes it easy for us."

"Yes?" Mr. Kendall ran his eyes, then his fingers, across the clean-cut angles and openings. "Don't let familiarity make you careless. You've got to have your mind on your work. Take that

piece in and leave it on the foreman's desk on your way home to-night."

This time the boy's face flushed. "That's not necessarily a complaint, Hall," Mr. Kendall said, with the trace of a smile. "Remember, there are better jobs than this one." He turned abruptly and picked a piece from Scott's tray. "There's an edge which will not pass inspection," he announced. "How long have you been here?"

"Month."

"Is that all you've learned?" asked Mr. Kendall, his eyes meeting Scott's.

"Do you mean you're not satisfied with results," the man demanded in so calm a tone that Dick looked up in wonderment.

"I didn't say that. I'll give you a bit of friendly advice, too: Don't overlook too many little things."

"You needn't worry," retorted Scott indifferently. "When I finish a job, your inspectors won't have to go over my work." With that he extended his hand for the frame Mr. Kendall still

balanced in his fingers, and, to Dick's added amazement, dropped it back in the tray for finished work. For a moment, the boy expected an explosion, but, instead Mr. Kendall nodded once more, and started on down the room.

But before he had taken a dozen steps, he wheeled and came back. "By the way, Hall," he said, "Mr. Tregressor tells me he's succeeded in interesting you in his work amongst the youngsters in town. If any of them should ask you, tell them I'm behind it. It's a fine influence. Get Scott into it."

"Guess that's what I was really trying to do," confessed Dick.

"Keep it up,— outside shop hours," advised the man, and, this time, went on through the door without stopping at Weinberg's office in the corner.

For perhaps three minutes, Dick worked in silence, then his feelings got the better of him. "Jim," he asked, "was that meant for a call?"

"What?"

"Was the boss trimming us for talking too much?"

"He wasn't trimming you," he growled; "get back on the job. I've got troubles of my own."

For the next hour Scott would not reply even to the most casual remark, nor could Dick imagine what was the trouble. Certainly he could see little in what Mr. Kendall had said to make the man sulk so openly. But if he had been able to read what was going on in Jim Scott's active brain, he would have thought of him as anything but a sulker.

From time to time, he was vaguely conscious that Scott was watching the door of the foreman's cubby-hole room, and, whenever Weinberg came out on his frequent tours of inspection, he thought that Jim's eyes followed Weinberg's progress more closely than his file followed his work. He knew that his friend hated the big foreman, for he never missed a chance to anger him, and, once or twice, Dick had been afraid their clashes would result in Jim's instantaneous discharge, for Weinberg was short of patience and over-proud of his authority.

It was close to five o'clock when Scott saw Weinberg, on his final rounds for the day, approaching

with all the air of a Roman emperor inspecting his slaves. He bent low over his bench, but, just as the foreman was behind him, he lifted the pistol frame he held and patted it tenderly. "The only thing that's keeping me on this bum job," he announced to Dick, "is the hope that every gun I help make'll kill fifty Huns."

The even step behind him never changed. "Wish they'd start a night shift so we'd turn out more," he said.

Weinberg stopped. "If Kendall methods do not please," he snapped, "you know what you may do."

"Sure! But I'm waiting for the old U. S. to go in. I'd rather kill mine under my own flag, wouldn't you? Oh, I forgot! You're a German, aren't you," he said with a rasping laugh.

"I am American and —"

"Then don't get hot under the collar," advised Scott carelessly. "No one's trying to start a race riot, me least of all. Only I do hope I'm going to live to jab a bayonet at a Hun."

Weinberg was controlling himself with increasing

difficulty. He wanted an outlet for his temper and he looked about for an excuse. At that moment Dick snapped the file with which he was working. "Ach!" exploded the foreman. "Always careless. It shall be stopped from your pay."

The injustice left the boy speechless. It was an accident that was all in the day's work. However, Dick knew that not only was the man furious but that he had borne a grudge against him ever since Tom Hall had openly protested to the Kendalls against the man's appointment to his old foremanship. Nor had Dick's own thoroughness in thrashing Weinberg's big son Oscar, for bullying small boys, added to the foreman's love.

Tempted now to protest against injustice, it was Scott's scarcely breathed "Easy!" which calmed him quicker than any warning he had ever received and he picked up another file with a low-spoken "All right, sir."

His docility gave the foreman an even greater sense of authority. "Of carelessness from you we have had sufficient," he said, in his stern, precise

English. "I will not have careless boys in my department. Before, I have warned you. I warn not a third time. You are a disturbing force here."

This time it was Dick who gave the warning, for he saw Scott's feet shift and the muscles in his arms twitch. Some sixth sense came to Weinberg's rescue and told him that he had gone far enough. With a low growl, he wheeled about and walked away, his chin in the air.

"For a real 'American,' he stood a good deal," observed Jim with a grin. "He's got mighty good self-control, blast him!"

"I shouldn't think he had any."

"You and I never seem to agree. When are you going to take Kendall's advice and start missionary work on me?"

"Not in working hours," declared Dick fervently. "My job looks good to me, even if I haven't the strangle hold on it I thought I had."

"Sorry I got Weinberg down on you; didn't mean to do that."

"'S all right, Jim. He's been looking for a

chance to get me for months. He's equally sore at you."

"Don't worry about me, young fellow; my eye teeth came through my gums years ago. I never keep a job long anywhere." With that he picked up his tools, and, whistling between his teeth, went to work.

But the incident had made the boy uneasy and it was hard for him to concentrate his attention on his task again. Whenever his eyes wandered, he saw Scott bent over his bench and it came as an even greater surprise when he caught the low-uttered exclamation of satisfaction and heard Scott's tools clatter into the drawer. "What's up?" he demanded.

"Going to call it a day."

"It's only 5:30, Jim."

"Guess that clock's wrong."

"But Weinberg?"

"Just gone out with Schwartz."

"What's Schwartz doing up here?"

"Search me! Maybe they're going to have a

loyal Americans meeting to-night; maybe he just wanted to gossip with his pal."

"But Schwartz never comes up here," said the boy thoughtfully. "The tempering room crowd say he's always picking on them."

"Maybe he's going there to pick some more," retorted Jim with a shrug; "that's their worry. Good night." He slammed the drawer closed and hurried toward the exit through which the two foremen had disappeared.

His effrontery in following them astounded the boy. It was adding needless risk to the big one he took. He did not want Jim to lose his job, especially for a breach of shop rules. He was worried, but he tried to drown his worry in his work and to confine his speculations as to why Mr. Kendall had ordered him to take that frame to Weinberg's room.

He was examining it for the third time when some presentiment caused him to look round. His jaw dropped and his eyes grew wide. Scott was going into Weinberg's office. He must have met the fore-

man on the stairs and have been ordered back to await the foreman's wrath.

It made Dick almost sick to think of Jim disgraced, and every few seconds he turned to look for the coming of the foreman. But, inside of three minutes, Scott came out of the office as casually as he had entered, and Dick, seeing him stroll down the other stairway, gave a great sigh of relief. It was evident that Jim had been sent into the closely guarded room on some errand.

As is always the case, he found that worrying over another's trouble had added to his own. When the whistle blew, he was nearly a full piece behind his schedule. Thinking he could catch up in five extra minutes, he went at his filing like an angry bee. It took longer than he had expected, and when he came to put his things away he found the shop deserted. Grabbing the frame Mr. Kendall had referred to, he started on the run for the foreman's office. Opening the door, he darted in, laid the piece on the desk and started out again at full speed but, as he turned the corner, a big arm barred his way.

"What were you doing in my room?" demanded Weinberg.

"Mr. Kendall ordered me to leave a frame there."

"Why?"

"He didn't tell me that. Supposed he explained to you."

"Um! Where did you put it?"

"On your desk."

"So! Good night."

Hardly had Dick gotten into the swing of his work the next morning before one of the helpers ran up to him. "Old Weinberg wants you in his office," he announced breathlessly, "and, believe me, he's some ugly."

"All right." He put down his file, but as he turned from his bench, Scott looked up.

"Don't let him bluff you into anything," he advised.

"Don't worry about me." In spite of his nonchalance, however, Dick began to worry a little about himself. It was the first time he had been summoned into that room. Weinberg made it a

point to see his men at their work, unless it was something unusually important.

As Dick went into the office, the big foreman turned slowly in the chair before the desk. "Close the door," he ordered. "Come over here and stand where I can see your face." For a long moment he studied the boy's features through half-closed eyes, then, resting a hand on each knee, he shot forward his bullet-shaped head. "So you are the thief," he announced, his voice booming like a gun.

"Thief! What are you talking about?" Dick was so astonished that his voice broke.

The foreman, quick to take this as a sign of weakness, was as quick to change his whole manner. Aggressive brutality faded into sly cunning and a sneering smile spread across the thick lips. "So!" he exclaimed. "It was that you thought old Weinberg a sleeping oaf? That which you stole from this desk last night, put back."

The boy's face was white with an indignation which shook every fiber in his body. "I'm no thief," he cried.

"'I'M NO THIEF'"

Weinberg's head moved in well-assumed sorrow. "Is it that you take me to be simple? Is it that you forget that I caught you here and that your excuse for being here was as stupid as you think I am stupid?" He straightened, and, shaking a finger close to the boy's face, said, "There is nothing which you can gain by lying. You were in here; you stole; you are the only one who came in here; none of my men come here unless ordered by me."

"But Mr. Kendall himself ordered me here."

"Was it that he, too, ordered you to steal from my desk? Some one came in here; some one stole; you are the one who was here; you are the thief."

Dick, in spite of the shock and of his anger at being accused of dishonesty, tried to calm himself so that he might think clearly. Then, in a flash, came remembrance of Scott's visit to this same room. If a theft had been committed, Scott was the thief. The knowledge sickened him. He could not believe that the man whom he had accepted as a friend had proved dishonest. The thought drove his own predicament from his mind and all his loyalty asserted

itself. No matter how circumstances might point an incriminating finger, he would no more believe evil of Jim Scott than he would of himself.

"Come," said the foreman, in an insinuating tone, strangely out of keeping with the aggressive poise of his body; "restore that which you took and I will be the strong man with the weakling. You shall have one more chance, not because I believe you to be honest, but because I am generous. It was you who abused my son; I will return good for evil."

"I don't want generosity," declared the boy, "I want justice. I'm going to have it."

"So! Who are you to say what you will have and what you will not have? You will have that which I am pleased to give you. You will return that which you stole within one hour, or it shall be known that you are a thief."

"But I've taken nothing. I don't even know what you've lost."

"Do not add lies to the theft. If you did not take it, you know who did. It is for you to return

it. If it is not within my hand within the hour, you go to Mr. Kendall as a thief and tell him that no boy who is dishonest works under me. But to me you shall return that which you stole. My word is good."

CHAPTER IV

BACK FROM THE FRONT

Dick went out of that office in a daze. Never before had his honesty been questioned; never had anyone dared doubt his word. Vaguely, he began to realize how desperate was his plight, to grasp the full scope of the plot the crafty foreman had sprung. Try as he would, he could see no way out. Even if he found, and returned that mysterious thing which had been stolen, he would still be held guilty. He could see no way of proving his innocence.

But, slowly, the courage which had kept him fighting for the past two years began to return, and, with it came the remembrance that friendship was the greatest thing in the world. All that he had to do was to tell Jim Scott the whole story and his friend would find some way to clear him. For, even now he would not believe that Jim could really be guilty.

His step became more firm as he hurried past busy

workmen and whirring machines. To his relief, Jim was watching for his return. "What's up?" he asked, with a smile which was far different from the expression on the boy's face.

"Someone stole something out of Weinberg's office last night. He's accused me and given me an hour to return it."

Scott raised his eyebrows. "And if you don't make good?"

"I'm fired for being a thief."

"Didn't swipe it, did you?"

"You know I didn't."

"Then what you goin' to do about it?"

"Don't know. Thought I'd like to talk it over with you. Thought you might see some way out."

Scott's eyes met the lad's squarely. "You don't think I'm the thief, do you?" he asked in a calm voice.

Dick's teeth closed over his lower lip. "Jim," he said with an effort, "I don't know what's been taken, or who took it, but you've always played the game with me and I'm going to with you. I saw

you go into that room last night when Weinberg was out. I was the last person to leave this shop and no one went into the office but you. He claims that whatever was taken, was taken then. I know I didn't take anything."

"But you're mighty sure I did," retorted Scott coldly.

"I'm nothing of the sort," answered Dick. "I'm only telling you what I know about what happened. I'm not accusing you of anything; I'm not asking you to tell me anything; I'm only talking to you as I'd expect you to talk to me."

"And you're hoping I'll go to Weinberg and give it back."

"I know that you'll do the square thing, if you know anything about it."

"Did you tell Weinberg that you saw me go in there?"

"Course not."

"And you're the only one he suspects?"

"Yes."

"Then," announced Scott calmly, "you'll have to take your medicine."

Dick gasped. All his hopes went glimmering, and with them his belief in human nature. Without a word he took off his apron and put his tools in the drawer. "I'd rather counted on you," he gulped. "I'll have to fight this out alone, now. But don't you think I won't win out. And you needn't worry about my giving you away."

"It's because I have taken the trouble to know you that I'm sure you won't," Scott muttered under his breath. "Also, you may find that I'm not such a bad friend as you suppose," he added, as the boy walked away.

Dick's steps dragged as he went to the locker room in the basement. His one idea was to get away where he could be alone and think. He realized the factory would be an utterly impossible place for him if others thought him a thief, and he knew Weinberg well enough to be certain he would not keep the charge to himself. He had hoped to work for the Kendalls all his life, to make himself invaluable

to them, even to win a place in the office some day and be Stephen Kendall's right hand man. Now that was all ended. He would have to find other work and it would have to be far from Kendallville.

As he put on his coat, another feeling came over him. It was here he had done his first work, earned his first dollar, played his part among men. The very thought of leaving the noise, the smell of oily steel, the friendly workmen, made him homesick. Then, too, there was Mr. Kendall, who, in his aloof way, had been his friend. The desire to thank him for having given him his first chance became too strong to be resisted, and, without considering that he had been ordered to report to him, he started for the main offices.

Too absorbed in his troubles to look about, he did not see Jim Scott coming out of the separate building in the south corner of the factory yard. But it was apparent that Scott was not so blind. He turned sharply and ran into the factory through the engine room.

As Dick came into the office he felt as if every book-keeper was looking at him and saying, "There's a thief. Look at that thief, Dick Hall!" He almost jumped when Jimmie Farnsworth ran up with a cheery, "Hello! Come over to see if we've a vacant foremanship on the new night shift for you?"

"Night shift?" repeated Dick absently.

"Surest thing you know! Begins work as soon as we can get the hands. War's making the business boom."

"Is Mr. Stephen busy, Jim?"

"No," chuckled the youngster, "no. He doesn't do a thing but sit round and read the newspapers. Want to get him to go skating with you?"

"I'd like to see him a minute, if I could."

"Well, seeing you're a pal and a Scout, I'll take a chance," agreed Jimmie and dashed through the swinging gate toward the private office in the corner.

He came back at full speed. "Caught him," he panted; "go right in, but make it short. We're busy over here."

Ordinarily, Jimmie's assumption of equality with the owners would have amused Dick, for he had not had experience enough in the office to appreciate that one of Stephen Kendall's new ideas was to make his people feel that they were as much a part of the Kendall Arms Company as his father or himself. But he went on without more than a word of thanks.

Mr. Kendall glanced up from a sheaf of papers spread on the desk before him. "What is it?" he asked.

There was a strange friendliness in the usually crisp voice which confused the lad. All at once he seemed to see the human side of this strong, self-contained man. There was a light in the depths of the usually cold eyes which was somehow different, which made Dick suddenly understand why the men who had grown up with Steve Kendall were ready to follow him blindly. The remembrance of his errand brought a sharp stab to his heart, but he gritted his teeth and stepped forward.

"I've come to thank you for all you've done for me," he blurted.

"Got a better job?"

"No, sir."

"Not dissatisfied with us?"

"No."

"Think you ought to be paid more?"

"No, sir."

"Care to tell me the trouble, Dick?"

The unexpected use of his Christian name brought a lump into his throat. The keen blue eyes did not leave his face for an instant, and Mr. Kendall saw that the youngster's burden was far too heavy for his shoulders long before Dick realized how desperately close he was to breaking.

"Just give that door a push. The noise bothers me this morning. Been working hard over these new contracts and my nerves are jumpy. Now," he went on, in the same easy voice, "let's have the whole story."

Haltingly, at first, then with a rush, Dick poured out the tale and the man allowed him to finish with-

out interruption. "So," he announced with a gulp, "I've got to go."

"I don't see it in that light," stated Mr. Kendall promptly.

"Wha — what do you mean?"

"I mean that if someone had accused me of doing something crooked, and if my conscience was clear, I'd everlastingly stick and fight. You were saying something like that to Scott only yesterday. Why don't you practice what you preach?"

"But how can I? Weinberg would fire me."

"As long as I was the one who gave you that job, I think I'll be the one to take it away, when the time comes."

"Do you mean it? Do you really mean it?"

The man rose, and, coming round the corner of the desk, put his hand on the boy's heaving shoulder. "I don't mean it in the way you think," he said kindly. "I don't mean that I'll go over the head of one of my foremen. That would be fatal to our whole organization. And I do not want trouble with Weinberg. But there are other ways. You

believe in yourself, but you've taken it for granted that others don't believe in you. That's not true modesty. You've made a good name here, yet you're ready to lose it without making a fight. It isn't the fellow who runs away who comes out on top; it's the man who sticks and faces odds with a smile and it isn't like you to quit cold."

Dick bit his lips. The idea that anyone thought him a coward hurt almost as much as that anyone could think him a thief. Yet, after all, wasn't Mr. Kendall right? Red waves of shame surged up into his cheeks and he knew that Mr. Kendall was. "I'll go back and fight it out," he stated between tight-shut teeth.

A strange smile flickered across the man's face. "I knew you had the sand," he said, "but, hold up a minute. Learn not to jump at conclusions, too. I can't put you back on the old job without forcing the issue with Mr. Weinberg. If I'm to help you, you must help me. You'll have to go on the night shift when it starts next week, and I want nothing said until then about my giving you the job."

"I'd rather face Weinberg," admitted Dick; "I'd rather fight him in the open, but," he added gamely, "I'll do whatever you say."

"That's more like it. The hardest part," he added with an encouraging pat on the back, "will be loafing till Monday."

Dick appreciated that even before he had left the office; knew that by walking out of the factory he had made his first mistake; knew that Weinberg would jump at the conclusion that he had admitted his guilt by his act. But big, friendly Stephen Kendall had asked him, Dick Hall, to help him by keeping quiet, and while he could not understand, he would do that as loyally as he would fight for himself. But the question of how to explain the four days of idleness to his father was now the burning problem.

He met it in the only straightforward, manly way and it drew the man and boy even closer together, for the father understood on the instant how any breath of suspicion would seer his son and he went deeper than Stephen Kendall had gone in showing

him the bravery of an honest fight against injustice.

What Dick did not know was his father's anxiety over the true cause for Weinberg's accusation. Nor could he guess Weinberg's object in not telling the boy what had been stolen. As for Scott's part in the affair, Dick had kept that to himself. None should ever say that he had leveled the finger of suspicion.

But within twenty-four hours he began to feel the full weight of this same finger. If Weinberg himself did not speak, he made no effort to curb the wild tongue of his son, and, while many listened to the youth's highly colored story of Dick's disgrace, at least one did not. Of the loyalty of Billy Defoe, the Weinberg cub's bruised and battered face bore eloquent testimony.

The news of this championship came quickly to Dick, and while it both comforted and cheered, he found it took all his courage to face his friends, for, boylike, he was supersensitive and thought the older men must suspect him because, out of well meant sympathy, they kept their true indignation

to themselves. If Mr. Kendall's strange request for silence had not sealed his lips everything would have been easier.

As for Jim Farnsworth, Nick Root and the two other youngsters with whom he had spent that evening at Mr. Tregressor's, they left no room for him to doubt their real friendship, and their way of expressing it had a new effect on Defoe. Unknown to Dick, Jimmie had a long talk with him. It was not until Dick chanced to meet Mr. Tregressor on the street, that he in any way connected the new bond which had drawn all the lads closer, with the Scouts. He had quite expected they would drop him now. The old minister's hearty command to report at his home the following evening made his heavy heart leap. Certainly this Scouting was the real thing.

He found himself counting the hours, and, to make them pass the more quickly, he plunged into the study of wig-wagging and Scout law. It pleased him, too, to discover that Carter and Knight had received similar invitations from Mr. Tregres-

sor and were as nervous about them as he had been over his first call.

Yet, in spite of their early enthusiasm, it was a rather quiet group of boys who appeared at the minister's home. Dick was astounded at Defoe's presence, nor did the lad offer any explanation for his unexpected switch to the Scouts. Carter and Knight, too, were visibly embarrassed over finding themselves in strange surroundings and the younger lads were all more or less concerned lest something should crop out which would bring up the topic of Dick's trouble, the one thing which was on all their minds.

Mr. Tregressor, however, was as clever at peeking beneath boyhood's rough upper crust as he was at the lesser task of putting guests at their ease. Even the over-conscious Defoe found his host's mood contagious, and was soon talking and laughing with the rest, for to-night there was a subtle something about Mr. Tregressor which made them all feel like putting their best foot forward. Every once in a while a smile crinkled the wrinkled face

and the blue eyes glowed with a pleasure the man made no attempt to conceal.

"It's fine to have all my boys here again," he exclaimed, pushing a dish of candy nearer the none-too-backward Nick. "I'm delighted you three fellows have come," he went on, turning to Carter, Defoe and Knight. "Dick was a bit afraid you wouldn't be interested in the Scouts, but I've yet to find the boy who isn't when he knows their object."

Bud Carter crossed his legs more comfortably and sank further back in the easy chair. "It's become a habit to follow old Dick," he acknowledged, "and, this time, this signaling stuff made a base hit with me. I've always had a bug for the navy. I'd like to get in as a wireless operator and anything I can learn in that line helps."

"Why not take up the real wireless? That's a part of Scout work."

"Really! Me for it! When do we begin?"

"Where do I come in?" interrupted Defoe. "I never saw a ship and I'd get sea-sick if I did. I

don't want any navy for mine. The old drawing board looks good to me, and, if I can ever learn the trade, I guess the Kendalls will give me a chance in the drafting room."

"You can take that up for a part of your Scout work, Defoe."

"Say!" chuckled Bud. "Dick didn't tell us this was a high school. We thought it was taking walks and cooking dinners while you waved flags."

"I thought I'd tell you the things you were usually keen about," admitted Dick; "I knew the rest would work itself out."

"Maybe it will, but it's slow coming. Let's get started."

Mr. Tregressor was accustomed to boyish enthusiams, but the eagerness of these lads to gain knowledge which would be of practical value pleased him quite as much as had Dick's more quiet acceptance of the ideals of Scouting. He knew that his part was to blend the two extremes and to mix wisely the ideals with the out-of-doors features, the major appeal to the less mature lads, to whom school

and factory furnished almost as much real study as they could assimilate comfortably.

For a few minutes neither Carter nor Defoe took kindly to starting as Tenderfeet, but then they grasped the wisdom of the plan of organization, and Mr. Tregressor was more than pleased with their whole-hearted approval and knew that Dick had chosen his first men wisely.

"It's going to take some reading to get up on all those things," admitted Defoe, "but I guess it won't hurt me any. I've been spending a whole lot of time doing nothing in particular."

"When it comes down to knowing the civil government of this village, I can at least answer that," sighed Bud; "just say 'Bullet' and you've said it all. Even Mr. Steve takes his orders from his father. Say," he exclaimed, overcome with the shock of an original idea, "let's all go see old Bullet about Dick. We've got an organization. He'll listen to us."

There was a moment's sorry silence as Bud realized he had crashed into forbidden ground with both

clumsy feet. But, before he could get in deeper, Mr. Tregressor came to his rescue. "You haven't that sort of organization," he said. "Of course you fellows will stand together, but you must do it in a way which will not interfere with each other's rights as individuals. You must stand on your own feet to be strong men; you must learn to rely on your own judgment and learn how to form that judgment correctly. To do that you must know yourselves. You must be self-reliant; you must be prepared. Why, once I knew a man — But I'm not going to do all the talking," he added with a smile. "You four organize your new patrol over there in the corner, while I put Nick through his signals."

"Fine!" agreed Defoe. "But I can see Bud organizing anything while that kid's doing something he wants to learn. We'll just elect Dick leader and let him do the bossing."

"But I don't want to," protested Dick, "I —"

"Don't remember hearing anyone ask you whether you did or not," laughed Ted Knight. "Bill's motion's carried three to one."

This off-hand election to leadership of the new patrol did more than anything else could have done to prove to Dick that they were all behind him, and knowing better than they what the position stood for, he was determined to prove himself worthy of filling it. "If you fellows believe in me," he began,—

"Oh, forget it!" exclaimed Bud.

"Weinberg's only a half-baked cross section of a sausage," declared Billy. "They ought to run all the Germans out of the country."

"Who's bombing the Hun?" demanded a big voice from the doorway. "There's still enough of me left to help him carry on."

Mr. Tregressor was on his feet, his face alight. "Dal!" he cried. "Is this the way you've learned to obey orders? I told you not to come in till 8:30."

"Three minutes past zero, Gov'nor. So this is your squad! Recruiting looks a bit dull but material good. Hello, fellows!"

"My son, boys," announced Mr. Tregressor.

"Dal arrived just before supper, and I was saving him as a surprise." His eyes glowed with pride as he laid a hand affectionately on the empty sleeve of the lithe, handsome man who had burst in. Then he introduced them in turn, lingering over the ceremony, as if he were giving each boy the treat of his life — and, to Mr. Tregresssor, it was just that. "Now sit down, Dal," he ordered, when he had gone the rounds, "and tell these fellows something about real wig-wagging."

"But I want to hear more about the German sausage you're going to run out of the country. I'm still interested in sausages on the run. Which one's camping on the trail of the Hun?"

Billy Defoe's face portrayed his very real embarrassment over being brought into the lime-light, and, in his confusion, he began to blurt out the whole story of Weinberg's injustice. Twice Dick tried to stop him, but both times Dal Tregressor silenced him with a shake of the head. "Carry on, youngster," he ordered; "it sounds true to form."

But when Bill had finished, the soldier turned

squarely on Dick. "What was stolen?" he demanded.

"Don't know."

"You people here make munitions, don't you? What you got Germans in the place for?"

"Easy, Dal, easy! You're not in Flanders."

"Apparently not. Anybody in this country awake yet? If a German foreman had started something with me, youngster, I'd have stuck round till he was sick of trying to finish it."

If Dick had been uncomfortable before, it was as nothing to his sensations now as he felt the soldier eyeing him with what he mistook for contempt. He had never wanted to justify himself so much as before this veteran, but he could not speak unless he went against Mr. Kendall's orders, without involving Jim Scott.

Tregressor was quick to note the boy's distress, and, like the big, whole-souled man he was, wheeled round on Dick. "Don't get the idea I'm criticizing you, Hall," he said; "you look like the sort of chap who'd play off his own bat and play square. But it

makes me mad all the way through to see how you Americans are letting the Germans put it all over you. You'll wake up some day, and what all we people over across have been hoping is that it won't be too late. But take this from me and remember it: I've carried a Kendall gun into places where it's argued for my life, but I'd have been a big sight more scared if I'd known a German foreman had had a hand in its making. That's what I think of Fritzie. Having eased that out of my system, I'll try to be civilized again. Father, you didn't know you'd reared a barbarian, did you?" he added, with a good-natured laugh. "Somehow life over there makes a man want to talk as straight as he lives or dies. Is that real candy?"

"It is," asserted Mr. Tregressor, "but it's not for you, nor will it be, until you learn not to preach hate to my boys."

"Now what do you chaps think of that!" he exclaimed, looking about the circle with an expression which almost convulsed them. "Do you suppose he has Prussian blood in him to make him show such

cruelty? Let's test him." He reached out his one hand and filled it with chocolates. "But not till you say so," he added in a quiet voice, glancing at his father.

"God bless you, boy! I was only joking." The old man's eyes were moist as he moved the dish nearer. "But, if you're going to commandeer these boys' candy, you've got to make some return."

"I think," piped up Nick, whose eyes, for the past five minutes, had been as wide as his mouth, "I think you ought to tell us something about the war."

"Please! Please!" they chorused.

"I'm not much of a yarner," he laughed, "but I've a sneaking suspicion I was lured in here by that innocent looking old party for some such desperate purpose. We were talking about seeing things through awhile ago," he said, crossing his knees and snuggling comfortably into the easy chair, as if such things felt good again; "suppose I tell you the story of the man who didn't know he was licked."

CHAPTER V

THE BEAVER PATROL

"I'm going to call this chap Vic La Motte because that wasn't his name," began Tregressor with an inclusive smile. "He walked like an Indian because he had walked a long way into the White North with real Indians. He was a dead shot, because, if he hadn't been, he would have been dead years before. And he was the cleanest fighting, straightest living dare-devil who ever came wandering into Ottawa,— and that's some tribute!"

"Where'd he wander in from?" queried the ever-curious Nick.

"Some way or other, you don't ask that sort of chap that question," the man answered with a slight smile. "He tells you what he wants you to know, and you let it go at that. From what he dropped later, though, I'd have taken my one guess that he

was up round the Saskatchewan country when something gave him the hunch there'd be more excitement presently in the East and he hit the trail with both feet.

"Chap I knew, who'd been in the Northwestern Mounted, introduced him to me. The war was about four hours old then and all three of us were anxious to find out how we were going to get into the game. The ex-policeman was all for the cavalry — thought the war was going to be won on horseback and hated to walk, anyway. He's fighting a biplane now," he threw in, "but La Motte was all for keeping only his feet under him. I felt about the same way. Never did like to be nursemaid to a horse. Anyway, it broke up the party, for the Northwest man headed back for Alberta and left Vic and me running round in circles wondering whether the Kilties or the Rifles would be sent across first."

"Never did understand why you didn't go to Montreal and enlist in Will's regiment," said Mr. Tregressor in a low voice.

"I did think of it, Gov'nor, but then, Will — he was an officer, you know and, in those days I was foolish about such things. Anyway, first thing I knew, there were rumors of a new regiment to be formed, and, after I heard 'em, I couldn't think of anything but how I was going to squeeze into it."

"Supposed all regiments wanted recruits," ventured Dick.

"They do. But some of 'em are fussier than others. This one wanted only veterans of the South African war or men who —" He stopped and his eyes began to twinkle. "I'll be making myself out a desirable party next," he laughed. "I knew a captain; that's how they let me in."

"He'd known him in the Klondike," explained his father. "They'd been through all any two men could experience."

"We thought we had — then," admitted Dal thoughtfully. "Anyway, they accepted me, and when I told La Motte, he started for headquarters like a musher after a string of runaway huskies."

"What's that like?" begged Jimmie Farnsworth.

"Man chasing a dog team. But he came back about as sociable as a wounded grizzly. Said they'd told him he was under weight, lacked fighting experience, and had had no military training. He managed to pack his temper as far as a telegraph office without its exploding, and then he set a few wires afire. I never did see those answers, but they did some good up at headquarters. Also, they added to Vic's troubles. They showed he was an American. I believe he finally proved Lexington, Ky., was in the Hudson Bay country, but the major always was a better judge of men than map work.

"'Thought they could keep me from doing my bit for the queen,' he snorted, when he came back to the room where we were living.

"I was mean enough to suggest that a king ruled the empire and he'd better be more careful, but he reckoned it didn't matter 'so long as the fightin's goin' to be good.' All he had to do now was gain three or four pounds over night. 'And what's that between friends?' he chuckled. 'I

haven't begun to fight that outfit yet. I'm flat broke, but here's where I go out and eat what you'd call a re-past.' "

"Why didn't you give him some money, Dal? It wasn't like you."

"He'd gotten me curious, too," confessed Tregressor. "I didn't want to spoil any fun. A lot of the fellows were keen for Vic by this time, and we all wanted to see how far he'd go on his own. One of the other regiments had sent word they'd taken him on, but he told their sergeant he was going with us in spite of us. So, what's he do that night, but breeze into the biggest restaurant in Ottawa, call for the proprietor to come forward and slap a hand on each of his shoulders when he did.

" ' You're a Canadian,' he charged; ' so'm I. But I ain't as much of a Canadian by five pounds as I got to be at 9:30 to-morrow mornin'. Do I feed here? '

"The proprietor caught the point. So did about fifty people at the tables. ' You do! ' he declared and there was a yell from all round the room.

"'It's goin' to be some eats, brother,' warned Vic.

"'You're the one who's running the risk, old son,' answered the proprietor.

"'Then bring on the meat,' dared La Motte, sitting down at a table all alone, with about ten of us lads lined up behind him and all the room cheering.

"He didn't go at it like a starved man, but just thoughtful and workmanlike, and he didn't mind all the talk, or the men and women crowding up to shake his hand. He just ate and ate and ate, and the waiters began to fight for the privilege of bringing him things. It was when a fresh young reporter came bustling in to get the story, though, that Vic put down his knife.

"'Stranger,' he drawled, all the fun gone from those cold, gray eyes, 'this ain't any special joke with me, or with the gent who's settin' up the chuck. If you're lookin' for trouble, go enlist and be of some use to your country. Mush!'

"He mushed," Dal added with a reminiscent chuckle.

"Thought mush was something you ate," observed Jimmie Farnsworth, his eyes big.

"Keep quiet, you!" Nick's voice was disgusted.

"Klondike slang for hike," explained Dal kindly. "La Motte went back to work, though, as if nothing had happened, but he was even more popular with that crowd. They'd have given him Ottawa, if he'd asked 'em for it. As it was, one old chap, with two sons already with the flag, begged the privilege of taking Vic home for the rest of the night and breakfast, with the right to drive him to the recruiting office in the morning. They went out together, arm in arm, the band playing 'em through the door and everyone yelling their heads off. Ottawa was some enthusiastic in those days, fellows."

"But did the recruiting office accept him?" asked Ned West anxiously.

Tregressor shook his head sorrowfully. "He'd had another steak for breakfast, but, when they put him on the scales, even the lieutenant said things. La Motte was a pound shy."

"Gee, but that was tough luck!"

"It sure was, Hall. We all thought it was Vic for the Kilties. But the old boy only laughed. 'Wait till I get me a lung full of air,' he said; 'then give me another whirl at those scales. I'm gettin' heavier every minute.'"

"They gave him the chance, but only because he was so game. None of them thought he'd ever make the weight."

"Did he?"

Tregressor nodded owlishly. "I've always suspected the old man who brought him down town in his car. I think he put his foot on the scales when everyone was looking out the window. But Vic claims not. Just said you couldn't keep a good man down, even in weight. Whatever it was, he gained six pounds in thirty seconds. He signed the muster roll before he'd stop to put his clothes back on."

"Then what happened?" It was Bud Carter who spoke, but the elder Tregressor's face was the most pleased.

"They herded us into training camp mighty soon,

youngster, and set us to work. And it was work, believe me, it was real work! Yet that man La Motte never seemed to get fed up on it. He must have had a heap of army training sometime, somewhere. They discovered that in short order. He was a corporal before that day when the Princess Patricia herself gave us the colors she'd embroidered and told us good-by and good luck. And let me tell you one thing," he added grimly; "these colors have dripped red but never been stained. Princess Pat will never be ashamed of Her Own."

"Nor will Canada," cried his father; "nor the empire. The Princess Pats and the Light Brigade march up to immortality side by side."

For a moment his big son looked at him with eyes suddenly tender. Then, as if to cover his feelings, he gave a short, gay laugh. "Don't you believe it, Gov'nor. It takes better than cavalry to keep pace with the Pats. At least," he added, "that's what La Motte said, when we'd finished our first route march."

"They gave us plenty of 'em, too," he went on.

"Word kept coming from over there to send men and the Pats had first call because most of us were veterans. We went over that first winter and got our first bath in Flanders mud and our first sight of the Boche parapet before we'd forgotten New Year's. And all the Tommies wondered what we'd do when we went over the top."

"It got on the nerve of a lot of us, that wondering if we Maple Leaf men had back-bone and it especially got Vic La Motte. Also there was a Hun machine gun in front of our position — it was near St. Eloi — which made him unusually peevish. He took it as a sort of personal insult, and got to shooting at it on all impossible occasions. The Hun got equally peevish at him and quite a lot of people got hurt on both sides of No Man's Land. They did on ours, anyway, and, as all our boys were fair shots, Fritzie must have got his, too."

"Vic grouched about that gun till he got the lieutenant's goat, and the lieutenant kicked to the captain till the captain got sore and carried it up to the major, who finally said 'all right.' Then the glad

tidings filtered their way back to Vic and he picked out half a dozen chaps who could crawl up and slap a mountain sheep on the nose and they went over the top."

"Back in the trench we didn't dare breathe for fear the Hun'd hear and start something. Every once in a while a flare would go up and light the wire, but those seven chaps would bury their noses in the mud and play dead. I've known long ten minutes, I've been in a wing which was in the air, I've been down to my last clip and wondering where the next cartridge'd come from, I've shivered in a support trench under drum fire and I've been in shell holes while the machine guns played over the edges like garden hose, but I've never dripped so much cold sweat as while we waited for something to start that night."

"And it broke, believe me, it broke! But it wasn't the bombs of our men; it was the rattle of that machine gun. The Hun crew had spotted 'em under the light of a star shell. We tried to cover 'em. We turned loose everything we had. So did

Fritzie. For twenty minutes it was a regular show. Then it died down, broke out again, died down and only the snipers stayed on the job."

"Were they all dead?" asked Dick in a low tone.

"After what'd happened, it seemed plausible," retorted Tregressor gruffly. "We'd started a scrap along quite a front and the messages which came in didn't seem to soothe anyone but the high command who sent 'em. It was all the officers could do to keep the companies in the front lines from going over and having it out with Fritz then and there."

"But right in the middle of our growling came a 'Bang! Bang!' We saw a flash in that machine gun emplacement, then the rifle fire began. If they'd ever have cut loose the guns, nothing on earth could have held the Pats. The whole show was going again only, this time, La Motte's machine gun seemed kind of disinterested and still."

"Well, anyway," he said, drawing a long breath, "nobody knew what had started the second scrap till just before dawn. Then something rolled over

our sand bags and crashed down into the trench. They dug it out and discovered it was La Motte. He only had three or four holes in him so, when he spotted the lieutenant, he stiffened up against the trench wall and tried to salute. But he crumpled."

"We didn't get the whole story till after the big fight. Then only a few of us were left to hear it. He'd played dead out there in the mud, laid still, with bombs hung all over him like candies on a Christmas tree, while the bullets swept overhead. If one had grazed him then, he'd have gone to pieces like a shrapnel. But, when the fire had died down, he'd wiggled forward. He knew his men were all down; he expected to go West any second himself. But, before he went out, he wanted that Hun gun. He'd started out to get it and he was going to. He did. He crept up till he could lob a couple of bombs into it. Then he lobbed 'em. That was the banging we'd heard. It was what started the second party, too. He tried to crawl for it but they dropped him with bullets in both legs. That would have discouraged any man but Vic. He pulled him-

self the rest of the way, pulled himself on his belly till he could roll over the top of the fire trench. It would have finished anyone else, but he didn't know when he was licked. Last time I saw him he was charging through the smoke 'somewhere in France' hunting the Hun who'd winged him. They say in the Pats," finished Tregressor, "that Vic La Motte would lick the Prussian guard, and then go hunting for a real fight."

"I'd like to know that man," declared Dick. "He's certainly gritty."

"Physical courage isn't the greatest courage," stated Mr. Tregressor soberly, "nor is it always the bravest man who faces the rain of steel and charges home. I like Dal's Vic La Motte as much as any of you do, but after all, he was only doing a thing it was his privilege to do. Now I'm going to tell you a story."

"Gee, but I'm glad I came!" chortled Nick. "It's a big night to-night."

"It will be full of bad luck for you, if you don't shut up," prophesied Jimmie. "Most of the time

we have to listen to you whether we want to or not but, from now on, you play safe and imitate a zero without a rim."

"I'm through, Mr. Tregressor. Didn't mean to butt in."

"It's all right, Nick, or will be, if my tale comes up to your expectations. It's about another soldier in the Princess Pats, not a soldier who didn't know when he was licked, but of one who put his fellow man above himself."

"He, too," he began, his elbows on his knees, his hands clasped and his eyes fixed on Dick Hall, "he, too, went out from the old Dominion in the first contingent. He went through all that Vic La Motte did and more. He fought in that thin, red line which saved the Empire, he went through that terrible day at Hooge and he came back to cantonments unscathed, while the Pats once more assimilated a depot brigade and changed themselves again from a band of tattered heroes into the same undying fighting machine.

"Again and again they took their place in the

first line and again and again they came back to fill the gaps in the ranks. Nothing seemed able to daunt them; nothing could make them falter, for the spirits of those who had gone hovered over the flag. I don't know the full story of this man," he went on, in an even quieter voice, yet in his every word there was a tingle which each boy felt in some strange way; "I don't suppose I shall ever know it. The Maple Leaf men do, rather than talk. But this much I heard; this much I know."

"Over there is a little, shell-wrecked village, one of hundreds where men and women and children lived in peace and happiness before the guns began to boom. I haven't seen it; I don't want to see it. I'd rather picture it as it used to be. It isn't a home town any more; it's just 'somewhere in France.'"

"But then it wasn't in France. The Germans held it; the Princess Pats were in the trenches on its western edge. One day came the order to advance. The stage was set. The guns had blasted a path. At the signal they went over, the shrapnel

and high explosives bursting in their faces, their own curtain of fire creeping on ahead."

"They went through, some of them, and they went beyond, still fewer of them. But when the German counter-attack was spent, that little town was again 'somewhere in France.'"

"Yet out in that new No Man's Land lay the dead and wounded of the Princess Pats and on them the defeated enemy vented his rage. No man could live out there in the open. Only those who had struggled into shell holes could hope for a few hours more of life. All day the Pats held, hoping for the sorely needed support which did not come. All day they listened to the cries grow weaker and fewer."

"Then came the night. I've lived through it so often in my own sleepless nights that I believe I can imagine some little part of the things those boys lived through. I can almost see the white light of those flares Dal told you about; I can almost hear the vicious splutter of those machine guns, as they searched out the wounded. But no man who did

not go through it can know what the Maple Leaf men went through."

"An officer wrote this much of the story of that night to me. He was in a trench angle, studying the German position, when a private of the Pats came up to him. Their words must have been few. Men do not talk much under such circumstances. I can see that soldier's crisp salute; I can see him lean his rifle against the trench; I can see him tighten his belt, then look at his automatic. Then I can see him crawl over the parapet and squirm out into the steel-torn night."

"And then," he said, his voice still lower, "I can imagine the whisper that ran down that thin-held line, as the word was passed that a man was out. Like them, I've counted the seconds in my own night, like them, I've prayed for the safety of all such men who go to the succor of the wounded. That's courage; that's the acme of heroism; that's offering one's life for a friend."

"And that's what he did," he said, straightening suddenly, his blue eyes swimming with unconscious

"'THAT'S WHAT DAL . . . DID THAT NIGHT" SOMEWHERE IN FRANCE"'"

tears as he turned to his own boy, "that's what Dal Tregressor of the Princess Pats did that night 'somewhere in France' and the second of the three wounded men he brought back from the living dead was the Vic La Motte he's held up to you as a hero."

For perhaps ten seconds not a boy spoke, and only the soldier's gruff, uncomfortable "What you tell 'em that for?" broke the silence. Then Nick Root surged to his feet. "Gee!" he cried. "Let's do something! Let's get out the flag."

Jimmie Farnsworth was up. Out from its place by the book cases he brought the Scout's Stars and Stripes. His hand shook a little as he straightened out the folds and saw the rest come to attention. Then, Mr. Tregressor leading, they repeated that pledge of allegiance to the flag which opens every Scout meeting.

It was Dick who first stepped up to Dal Tregressor. "I'd like to shake hands," he said bluntly. "Your story was a corker, but your father's was better. Both of 'em make a fellow ashamed when

he remembers how many times he's come near quitting."

Tregressor caught his father's eye, and took what he would have termed punishment like the soldier he was. Each boy wanted to shake his hand; each tried to express what was in his heart. Dal had not been more uncomfortable when a very high personage had pinned the Victoria Cross on his tunic.

"Look here," he finally broke out, "suppose we forget this stuff and be friends. I like that flag idea. A flag means a lot to a chap after he's marched under one. You seem to be getting the right idea about yours. If you're all Boy Scouts, why don't you drill?"

"We're in no way a military organization, Dal," stated his father emphatically.

"Oh! Thought I might be of some use to you."

Dick turned and looked deep into the calm gray eyes. "You can be a whole lot of use to some of us," he said. "They've asked me to organize a new patrol; will you be our scout master?"

"Splendid!" cried Mr. Tregressor. "Dal would be invaluable."

"'Fraid not," he answered with a smile. "Don't know the game, Gov'nor. It's each man where he fits best. I'll do my bit from the outside in some way."

"If you say so, you will." There was more than a trace of disappointment in the old man's face. "If you say so, you will, Dal," he repeated.

"Name your patrol for him, Dick," exploded Nick Root. "Call it the Beaver. That's the Canadian eagle."

Even Dal Tregressor roared. "Go ahead," he agreed. "But you fellows who belong to it," he added soberly, "must never forget that the beaver is a tremendous thing to live up to. I'll give you another motto to go with your 'Be Prepared'; 'Do it with a laugh.'"

CHAPTER VI

A GRAVE DECISION

NEVER had a night been so welcome as that when Dick went down to join the new shift; never a boy more delighted than he when told to report to old Ben Robinson, raised to night foreman of the assembling room. The thought that he had been promoted to a better job, the knowledge that Mr. Kendall had chosen this way of showing both his gratitude for silence and satisfaction over industry, gave him far more of a thrill than did the fact that his pay envelope would henceforth be fatter.

He liked both Mr. Robinson and his methods, and believed he would like all the new men whom he saw around him. As for the old ones, there were few who did not find opportunity to express their satisfaction over his good luck. But three things remained to trouble him: The least was Mr. Kendall's reason for inflicting such a trial on him, the

second was Weinberg's ill-concealed anger at his being re-employed and the greatest, his continued effort to find an explanation for Scott's action.

Having to work at the wrong end of the day cut him off from most of his younger friends, but, although he offered to resign his leadership of the Beaver Patrol, the rest would not listen. Bud Carter was appointed assistant leader, but with iron-clad instructions from all the members to do nothing without Dick's sanction. The boy spent a good part of this new spare time in the afternoon studying Scout law and signaling, and it was not many weeks before he was almost an expert with the flags and began to turn longing eyes toward wireless.

While he took solid satisfaction in self-improvement, his greatest pleasure came from the strange friendship which began to ripen between Dal Tregressor and himself. As March drifted to a close, the two were more and more together, for the man needed comradeship and dreaded to be left alone with the vivid memories of what he had gone through. He would have applied for work in the

factory had he had two good hands; he would have gone back to Canada had he not seen how his father clung to him and needed him to help bear the grief over that other son who slept in France.

Tregressor insisted that Dick spend at least an hour a day out of doors and they took long tramps together over muddy roads and soggy fields. It was on these hikes that Dick heard the stories of the trenches and came to understand the war which, daily, was coming closer and closer to the United States.

Then came that day in early April when President Wilson's speech to Congress proved a speech to the democracy of the world. Over night, Kendallville changed from an indifferent village to a throbbing, vital bit of the United States. The drawn, anxious expression on Stephen Kendall's face gave way to a confident smile as he read telegram after telegram which was rushed to his office, and a new life bubbled throughout the shops. Rumors were whirling this way and that. Every one was on edge. Overtime would seem like playtime if the guns they made

were going to bark beneath the Stars and Stripes at last.

On his way to work one night within the week, Dick heard someone calling wildly to him, and, the next moment, Bud Carter dashed up. "I've got it," he cried. "I've just heard and I've got it."

"If I've only one guess," grinned Dick, "it isn't sense. Get your feet back on earth, Bud."

"Not on your life! My feet are through with that stuff. I've passed my exams."

"What are you talking about?"

"Wireless! Navy! Oh, glory! Won't Mr. Tregressor be pleased, though. He taught it all to me, that and a heap more. The greatest thing you ever did, Dick Hall, was getting me into the Scouts. It gave me my chance."

"For the love of Mike, talk sense! What's happened?"

"Well," he grinned, taking a friendly punch at Dick's chest, "I heard the navy wanted wireless men and I wanted the navy. We're in the war now. I want to be sticking round when we take our first

wallop at a submarine. I saw my chance and I made a try at the exams. Mr. Tregressor'd coached me a pile at night," he threw in excitedly, "and, say, those exams were a cinch! Knew I'd killed 'em. Passed the physical exam., too. Now I'm ordered to report at Newport. Get me, you old land lubber? I'm a part of the big gray fleet and I'm going to help can the Kaiser. Whoopee!"

With another swing, this time at Dick's astonished head, he rushed on to impart his wonderful news to Mr. Tregressor, whom he stoutly believed to be the source of all his luck. Later, he was to learn that luck and preparedness were far different things. But that was when he was far from Kendallville, and great, oily waves curled in from a storm-swept sea.

Within the next twenty-four hours Dick heard that Bill Defoe and Longshanks Bliss, the newest tenderfoot of the Beaver patrol, had gained their parents' consent to enlist. Bill's attitude was far different from that of Bud, his life-long running mate.

"I had to do it," he said with new soberness. "None of my family's ever carried a gun and it's time some Defoe did his best to pay back the country for all it's done for us."

"Are you going into the navy with Bud?"

"No, I get sea-sick whenever I think of a ship. The infantry's what's going to see the whole game. I'm going into the regulars."

"Have you talked it over with Dal?"

"I haven't talked with any one; I didn't need to. I know what I want to do, Dick. Maybe I won't come back, but I guess I will. But, if I don't, I'll know that I've done the best I could and I'll try to do it with a grin."

Dick wanted to say much but, somehow, he could not put his thoughts into words, nor could Bill find any more to offer. For a moment the two looked into each other's eyes, and, for a moment, as all their years of comradeship passed before them, their hands met.

"Good luck, Bill!" said Dick; "it's like you to do this."

"Good luck, Dick! See you to-morrow before I go."

With that they parted, Dick to go on to the factory and the work which had, somehow, lost half its zest, his brain busy with the parts his friends were to play in the great war, busy with the part Dal Tregressor had already played, and busier yet with the part he could fill.

It was that same night that Stephen Kendall appeared among his men while they were eating their midnight lunch. To the older men, he seemed again the lad, fresh from college, as he leaned against a set of lockers and took big bites from an apple. "I've been put on the night shift, too," he announced with a smile. "My father believes that one of us should be on the job all the time, and, between us, it's going to be *some* job! We've been lucky enough to get a big contract, and, if we make good, more should come."

"We're with you," cried half a dozen men.

It was the chance he had hoped for. "I know that," he said with sudden seriousness. "You

older men have always stood side by side with us, and you new men are showing you're willing to do the same. The government's going to need men. Neither the army or navy is at full strength. It's the instinct of every American to do his all when his country needs him. I don't want to keep a man here from enlisting. My father and I have talked this over; any man who enlists will find his place open when the war's over."

The sharp yell of approval brought more color to his face, but he checked the enthusiasm with a quick, "Hold up! There's another side to consider, and it isn't as selfish as it sounds at first. You men are making arms for your army. You're doing your part here. If all of you who are of enlistment age should join the colors you'd put us in a bad predicament. Think that over before you decide. If they pass the draft law, I imagine you all will be exempted. I'm not asking you to go against your ideas of duty," he finished; "I'm only trying my best to think of my country. That's why I'm stay-

ing here myself. I've refused a commission, and it was the hardest thing I ever did."

It was one of the new men who started the cheering which Stephen Kendall could not stop. Even old Robinson was yelling. A dozen men were shaking the "big boss's" hands. Never before had he begun to appreciate his popularity.

"I'll tell you what I'd like to do," he announced, when quiet had been partially restored, "and that's start a home guard company. Not that we'll have trouble here," he added quickly, as he saw the men glance from one to the other, "that's guarded against already. We've always had good watchmen. But it seems wise to my father to strengthen that force, too. You men will all be given passes to-morrow and you'll not be admitted inside the new fence till you show them. So don't leave them at home and have to go back."

"Has anything happened, sir?" asked Robinson anxiously.

"No, nor do we intend that anything shall. The plant has become too valuable for us to take unnec-

essary risks. Caution's better than regrets, Robinson. That's why no visitors will be allowed, no strangers permitted near the place."

"What about this home guard thing?" asked one of the new men; "I've been in the militia; I'll take another chance."

"Good enough! My idea's to have regular drills and men like you can help teach those of us who are weak on drilling."

"Guess I ain't much of a teacher; I was only a corporal."

"That's more than I've ever been," acknowledged Mr. Kendall. "Suppose you act as sergeant now, and talk it over with the men on this shift. See how the idea takes hold. Urge the youngsters, and the men over military age, to join. We'll leave the rest to settle their own problems."

Dick, eating his sandwich and pie on the edge of the crowd, had listened intently, but the more he thought, the less this idea of a home guard appealed to him. It might be all right for the old fellows, but, somehow or other, he felt that he'd be ashamed

to march with them when he might be marching at Bill Defoe's side, or crouching with him in a bullet-swept trench.

He liked what Stephen Kendall had said about the men being free to go or stay, liked the idea that he was doing his part in the big work and that he was needed. But, as he went back to his bench, he began to wonder how much he really was needed, how vital a part he was playing.

He glanced down the brilliantly lighted shop. All the men looked older than he. Many were gray haired, the fathers of the boys he played with. It was important work they were on, their care and attention to minute detail proved that. Dick found himself wondering, more and more, if some older man could not take his place and so free him to play a young man's part.

It was not because Bud and Bill and Longshanks had already gone that he felt this new, haunting spirit of unrest; it was not Dal Tregressor's stories or example which made him study the assembled automatic in his hands; it was not the thought that

his father had gone out in '98 which made his fingers tighten on the grip and his head go up. It was the tingle of patriotism in his blood, the thrill at the knowledge that he was an American, the conscious pride which made his jaw square when he realized that the Stars and Stripes were up which made him, then and there, decide that there was but one thing for him to do.

He could hardly wait for morning to tell his father that another Hall was going to the colors. He knew he was young, but he had heard his father say, time after time, that the young man was the fighting man. Beyond that his thoughts were not of himself. He forgot his hard-earned proficiency in signaling, his value as a mechanic, everything except that his country needed men, and that he wanted to do his bit with a pack upon his back and a rifle in his hand.

The little house was silent when he arrived there with the dawn, and, although he crept into bed, sleep came only after regiment upon regiment had marched in review before his imagination, their col-

ors snapping in the wind, their men swinging past with easy stride. For, somehow, Dal Tregressor's picture of war had faded and he could see only the glamour of action and feel only the thrill of the unknown.

Dick awoke at ten o'clock and went down to find his father alone and deep in the paper, but he laid it aside as the boy came in. "Mornin', Dick," he said; "big news this morning. The Kaiser's found the trouble he's been looking for. The call's out for more men."

"I imagined so from what I heard last night. Coming out while I eat?"

"Sure!"

Dick pushed the wheeled chair out into the kitchen and to a place opposite his at the table and then began to eat. "Your old regiment ordered out, Pop?" he asked between bites.

"Dunno. It's been on the Border. They're not giving out much about our men. But I know one thing; if that crowd isn't sent across they'll be the maddest bunch that ever wore khaki."

"They must be a great crowd," sighed Dick; "I'd like to see them."

"I wish you could, my boy; I wish you could be one of 'em."

Slowly, and very quietly, Dick laid down his knife and looked up into his father's glowing eyes. "Why can't I be?" he asked.

"What do you mean?"

"What I said. Why can't I enlist, as you did in '98? Why shouldn't another Hall go out with the old regiment?"

For a long moment the two looked across the table and deep into each other's souls, but the face of the one grew red and that of the other more pallid. It was Tom Hall who heard the tramp of marching men now. To him, it was very real. Now he thought of his boy. "Of course you want to go," he said; "I couldn't bear it if you didn't."

"Then I can?" cried the lad; "you'll give your consent?"

"If you want it," was the even retort; "if you believe your duty is with the colors."

"I'll be eighteen in a few weeks," stated Dick. "They'll take me."

"Yes, they'll take you, and be glad to get your sort. You've the makings of a fine soldier. You've a level head and you'll obey. Those are the two great things,— those and good health."

"I wonder if I could get into your old company?"

"I guess there're some of the old officers left who may remember me. I can ask, if you finally decide that your duty lies in that way."

"What other way could it lie?" cried the boy, puzzled. "Certainly a fellow's first duty is to his country."

"I'd be the last man to dispute that, Dick. But, before you take such a vital step, you ought to make sure that you're doing your country your greatest good by fighting."

Dick's eyes grew round with astonishment. That his father should even hint that he might be of greater use anywhere but in the front line, bewildered him. The man saw his plight and it made his

own hard part the harder. "Have you talked this over with Stephen Kendall?" he asked; "has he said anything to the men?"

"Why, yes. He came in last night and said he'd keep any one's place open who enlisted."

"Was that all?"

"He said something about men who made guns doing their part. I don't remember much about that. I knew it would be easy enough to get some one to fill my place."

Tom Hall took a long, deep breath. "But how about filling it here at home, Dick?"

"You and the kids want me to go."

"Yes, want you to go — but can we spare you?"

"Father!"

"Well?" came the even question.

"It sounds almost selfish," gasped Dick.

Even under the pain, the man's face never changed nor did the tone of his voice vary. "Are you sure you've a clear idea of either selfishness or patriotism?" he asked gently. "I know you're willing to go, to stand whatever comes, to give your

life. I know the spirit you'd do it in, for I've done it myself. Leave that aside; forget your age — for you are a boy, even if you've done a man's work and carried a man's burden for two years; forget everything but the country we'd both die for. Are you serving your country best by enlisting?"

"It's the only way I can give it anything," said the boy.

"Stop and think, son. I know it's hard for you but you've no idea how hard it is for me. Here I am, tied to a chair and a bed, helpless, sick, no good. No, wait!" he commanded with more sternness than he had ever shown. "I'm an old soldier, and I can face things eyes front. If I had even part of a man's strength, I'd tell you to go, to take my old place in the ranks, to carry on. But, Dick, I'm helpless; I'm dependent on you; Sally and Nelson are dependent on you. The little we've saved wouldn't support the youngsters after they'd put me in a soldiers' home. We give the nation one fighting man and three mill stones."

Slowly Dick's lips parted and his hands, clutched

on the table before him, tightened until the knuckles became white. "That's true," he muttered, "all true."

"Yes," Mr. Hall repeated in a low voice; "it's true as true. I gave gladly and with a laugh, but I'd have taken a slacker's shame if I could have saved my boy his chance. I'm not saying you're not to do as you think best," he added. "If you think it is your duty to go, go and we three will love you and do our part to be as brave as you. It's for you to decide."

"I'm a slacker whatever I do."

"No," came the gentle contradiction, "no son of mine can be that; it's not in the blood."

"If I stay, they'll say I am."

"If you're going because you care what people say," declared Mr. Hall sharply, "you'll go in some other regiment than mine. There's no place for a coward in the old crowd."

"Father, that's unfair!"

"No, the truth is never unfair. You and I are facing the truth more squarely now than we ever

have before, and we're both suffering, Dick. Don't think it's easy for a father to say the things I've said. Whatever you do, you're going to do for your country, not to satisfy the gossip of Kendallville. It's the United States first, last and all the time."

The young head sunk low on the extended arms and there was a suggestion of a tremble in the strong young shoulders which made the man long to lean across the table and lay a comforting hand upon them. But, instead of that, Tom Hall drew himself up in his cushioned chair and his throbbing back stiffened until it was as rigid as in those old days when he had stood at attention as the flag went by. The fight was for the boy alone.

For a long time the room was absolutely still. Then, slowly, Dick straightened and his wide, dry eyes searched his father's face. "If I stay," he asked, "if I stay and make pistols, if I work overtime, if I do all that my strength will stand, will I be doing a little bit of my part?"

"What do you think?"

"I'm asking you."

"But I'd rather you'd tell me. It's for you to answer your own conscience in this. I've shown you your problem; it's for you to solve."

"Mr. Stephen said they needed men at the plant."

"You're not to consider what he said. You're answering your country's need."

"I owe you three —"

"You've more than paid the Halls," broke in his father; "it's your duty to your country now. You owe everything to her."

"But, father," he begged, "help me! What do you want me to do?"

It was almost more than the man could stand. But his jaw was determined when he answered. "I want you to be a man," he said, "and play a man's part honestly, squarely and with head up. I want you to do your duty as you see it, and, whichever thing you do, I'll give you my hand and say 'God bless you, boy.'"

"I know you will," Dick said with a quick gulp;

"you're that sort. You're game through and through." His chair went slowly back and slowly he came to his feet, his eyes still on his father's face. "And I'll be game," he cried. "I'll try to be as game as you. I'll fight — here."

CHAPTER VII

THE MAN IN OLIVE DRAB

Dick went back to his work in a more contented spirit than he had felt since his experience with Weinberg. There was a new incentive now, and he felt a greater eagerness in assembling the guns it would be another's privilege to fire. For a night or so he was conscious that Stephen Kendall was making more frequent rounds of the shops, and more than once the man stopped to talk with him. Oblivious, however, of Mr. Kendall's growing personal interest in him, a summons to the office on the third night came almost as another shock.

But his reception was the real surprise. "Come on in," said Mr. Kendall kindly. "Sometimes circumstances warrant breaking all rules, and I want to talk of an outside affair in your working time. You know young Tregressor?"

"Yes, sir."

"Sit down and tell me about him."

"That's quite an order," Dick admitted with a twinkle in his eye. "He's all white and true blue."

"Where's the red come in?"

It was the first attempt at a joke of which Dick had known Mr. Kendall to be guilty. It made him more at his ease. "His blood's all red," he flashed back; "all that he didn't spill in France."

"Could he work, if he wanted to?"

"He wants to badly enough, but he says no one wants a one-armed man hanging round."

"How does he know? Has he tried for a job?"

"I don't think so."

"Sure?"

"Pretty sure. He'd have told me, I guess; we're pals."

"Would you recommend him for an important position, one where he'd have a good many men under him, and a tremendous responsibility?"

"I'd trust him anywhere, if that's what you mean."

"Guess it's nearer what I did mean than I put

it," confessed Mr. Kendall. "Dick," he said in a sober voice, after a moment's consideration, "we've been tipped off to watch the factory even more closely. I'm going to establish a regular guard, and it's not only to be equipped for real trouble, but ordered to go and meet trouble half way. Tregressor doesn't look like a chap who'd be afraid of anything on two feet."

"Give him the chance," begged Dick. "Oh, do give him the chance. He's just the man for the job. He'd eat it alive. It would let him stay here with his father, too."

Mr. Kendall leaned back in his chair and studied the excited young face. "It's a good job," he said slowly, "good pay and certainly plenty of responsibility. You're not the first of my men I've talked it over with. I want a man they'll all trust, for, if they didn't trust him, they might think he distrusted them and was watching them. That would make trouble instantly. Two out of the four recommended you," he added.

"Me! When Dal Tregressor is here? Me?

Why, they're crazy! Dal's the man you want."

Mr. Kendall made no effort to conceal his pleasure. "That's what I call loyalty," he declared, "both to your friend and to us. There are mighty few young men who'd step aside like that, but I'll be as honest with you as you've been with me. I was going to offer Tregressor the place, if you said he was all right. They said you knew him best. I was going to do it, though, because I'm not as generous as you are. I wanted you somewhere else."

Dick flushed crimson and did his best to stammer his thanks.

"I'm starting the home guard I spoke of the other night," the man went on, his hands clasped behind his head. "I'm going to have but one set rule; *Members must be citizens.* I'll get in the men from the factory; I want you to get the lads of the Scouts who are old enough."

"I'll do anything I can to help. But it won't interfere with my work in the shop, will it? I'm trying to do my bit there."

"You'll have to do your bit in a good many places

before we're through with this," stated Mr. Kendall soberly; "we all will. If it does interfere, you'll have to find time for it some way. You can get a fine start with the lads in your Beaver patrol."

"Three have enlisted," stated Dick with pride.

"There are some left. They'll make a strong backbone. You can build around them, for they have learned how to carry out orders. I want twenty fellows between sixteen and nineteen. Can you get them?"

"I can try. That won't let in Jim Farnsworth and Nick Root. They're leaders in the younger bunch. They'll be sorry to be left out."

"Take care of them in some other way."

Dick thought for a moment. "Jim works in this office," he ventured. "He does all sorts of things. Why couldn't you let the kids be sort of a messenger company around the shops and the town? They could wear their uniforms all the time, and that would give any one a right to ask them to do anything. They'd be living up to their Scout oath."

"Fine! That's up to you, too. I won't interfere

with that in any way. Only, hereafter, all our boys in the office are in Scout uniform."

"But some of 'em don't belong," ventured Dick.

"Tell 'em I want them to," was the prompt reply.

"If you'd just as soon," said Dick, "I'd rather not. We don't want members forced in."

"That's sound sense," admitted Mr. Kendall. "Don't blame you. But I reckon they'll come in without either of us saying anything. They are good youngsters and they'll not only want to wear the uniforms, but they'll be still more anxious to do their bit. You'll fix that; it's not worrying me."

"I'll do my best," promised Dick. "We can count on most of 'em, I'm sure. This home guard thing won't mean that the fellows can't enlist in the army, will it?"

"Well, hardly! About the last thing I want, is to be strung up as a traitor. I'm thinking of the United States first, last and all the time, but just now the Kendall Arms Company seems to be a vital bit of the country. Figure it that anything you do here is keeping full the line of supplies."

"I'll try to think of it as even more."

"You're not far wrong, either. A lot of us would find it easier to do our fighting in France."

"Do you really think so?" he asked eagerly.

"I know so. And, what's more, I imagine I know why Tom Hall's boy isn't going across with those three friends of his."

Dick winced, but, somehow or other, the man's honesty and insight made him strangely comfortable. "When are you going to tell Dal?" he asked.

Mr. Kendall was quick to understand his eagerness to change the subject. "Suppose you tell him I want to see him," he suggested. "You might tell him what I want, too. You might also tell your father that you're to be my first lieutenant in the home guard. It may interest him more than it appeared to interest you."

"Do you mean that I'm to be one of the officers?" gasped Dick.

"Exactly."

"I'm too young. I've had no experience. There're a million reasons why I couldn't."

"Are there?" laughed Mr. Kendall as he rose. "Well, there are only two reasons why you're going to do it; one's because I want you; the other's because this time the job's seeking the man. Now go back to work. We've both a lot to do. But, Dick," he called, as the boy was going out, "remember that you're to come to me if you need help. George North is my second lieutenant, and you're to feel as free as he does to come here at any time."

If one thing more had been needed to convince Dick that he was in the midst of an astounding dream it was this final announcement. George North, next to the Kendalls, was the man to whom all Kendallville looked up. Middle-aged, reserved, upright, the cashier of the town's one bank, he was the adviser of all who were in difficulties. And now here was he, Dick Hall, made the third of a triumvirate to lead the town! The men of the factory were Kendall's, the men of the village, North's, and the boys of both had been assigned to him to lead!

He began to see that background of the Boy Scouts.

He went to work at this new task in characteristic fashion. For a couple of days none but Dal Tregressor knew the secret. But he also kept his eyes and ears open, and he found himself studying the chaps he had grown up with through new eyes.

Dal was a constant inspiration. Enthusiastic over his own chance, he was still more enthusiastic over Stephen Kendall. He routed Dick out of the house late the next afternoon and made him put away his book on signaling to tramp out into the country. "This book stuff's all right in its place, lad," he said, "but you and I've got to give theory the grand old go-by now, and go over the top at practical things. The big boss has told me the whole tale. How are you comin' on with your stint?"

"Getting 'em lined up in my mind," he answered, as they came into the street. "I've some good fellows and some who're not worth a rap."

"Then put the best of the good ones over the good

ones and go at the ruck yourself, old son. You want the whole bunch behind you."

"I know it. I'm going to have 'em."

"Good talk, that! You'll get 'em, if you feel that way. Wish I had you for my second in command."

"Who've you got?"

"No one yet. Kendall came out, like the gentleman he is and the officer he ought to be, and said he'd given me a job and told me to fill it and not bother him with excuses. We both knew he ought to have given me more time to organize, but I guess that's up to me now."

"Gee!"

"It's the way to play the game. Put a man on his own, if you want him to fight. How much funny-business am I going to stand for round that fence when my reputation's at stake? Exactly one little bit of none at all."

"Would you shoot to kill, Dal?"

"I've done it before this," he admitted with unexpected grimness. "If the Boche gets excited

round here, he'll find he overlooked one good hand."

"But there's not so many German-Americans here after all."

"Say, get over that, will you! Those two words don't mix any more. Either they're Americans or they're Huns. You don't hear us Britishers talking about German-Englishmen or German-Canadians. Don't do it here. A man's loyal to one flag only."

"But you fought under the Canadian and now you're talking United States."

"Sure I am!" agreed Dal cheerfully. "The two flags are going to rustle on the same pole in Flanders; you bet I'm not going to be the one to untwine 'em over here. Hello! What's doin'? Looks like khaki to me. Let's give him the once over and the glad hand."

Dick looked down the street and saw a half a dozen men from the night shift gathered about a man in olive drab. A soldier was a novelty in Kendallville, and the boy's blood tingled at the sight of the uniform. "You bet I'll go!" he agreed.

"Wonder if they've opened a recruiting office here?"

"Reckon so. They can't get at it too soon. He's a sergeant," he said, catching a glimpse of chevrons. "And an old timer, too. Look at the set of those shoulders and the way he's got his chin pulled in. Can't beat the regular non-com. when it comes to side, swank and scrap, old top."

The soldier was talking with one of the younger men in a low voice, answering his questions easily but holding the conversation in his chosen channel. Yet he was not so engrossed that he did not know all that was going on about him. From the moment Tregressor and Hall had come in sight, he had kept them in the corner of his eye, for there was a swing about the Canadian which brought a smile to his lips and a spring to the lad's step which made him nod approvingly.

"Hello!" exclaimed Dal with a cordiality new to all the local men. "Gunning recruits?"

The sergeant smiled openly now. "Not if I can get veterans. Which outfit'd you serve with?"

Dal laughed joyously as he held out his hand. "Glad to meet a lad in uniform," he stated. "Funny, how when you've once worn one, the old setting-up stuff shows through anything."

"Better get back into one again, old man. Going to be a lot doing over across."

"Wish I could," said Dal, wistfully.

"Can if you want. We're looking for fellows like you and your pal."

"Want to bad enough, but wanting won't get me there. No rookie snatcher'd wink at that." He held up his wristless left arm.

"Tough luck!" exclaimed the sergeant disappointedly. "Machine?"

"Ah-ah. Machine gun."

"What's that?" The question came sharp and terse.

"He's a veteran of the Princess Pats," said Dick, speaking for the first time.

For just a second the old sergeant looked at Dal, then his heels clicked and his hand snapped up in salute.

"Carry on!" growled Tregressor, embarrassed beyond words at this public tribute. "I only did my bit."

"And a fine bit it was, I'll bet my hat!" cried the American. "I knew you'd seen service, the second you rounded that corner. So you've been where I'm going! Can you beat it? Say men," he demanded looking about him, "I ask, can you beat it? You can't. This man's done the thing we all ought to be breaking our necks for the chance to do. Look him over. Is there a live wire here who doesn't want to be like him?"

"Quit it!" ordered Dal. "I'm no side show."

"You bet you're not," declared the sergeant; "you're the big show in the main tent. You're the walking, breathing, living image of what these chaps might be if they'd get into olive drab instead of greasy overalls. We're going to show the Kaiser some regiments the Princess Pats won't be ashamed to charge home with," he cried. "Who's for one of 'em? Are you fellows going to stick here making guns when you could shoot 'em? Who's going

to be the first to put Kendallville on the map?"

"Three of the fellows have gone already," offered Dick, resenting this suggestion that his native town was not doing its share.

The sergeant whirled around. It was the chance he'd been working for. "Friends of yours?"

"Yes."

"Goin' to let 'em fight while you hang back and talk about 'em? Goin' to let somebody else carry the old flag while you stick round home and sing 'The Star Spangled Banner' with the women folks? Well, that's being one kind of soldier. Only," he added, "you didn't size up that way when I first caught you between my sights. You looked like the kind who'd step up with the first bunch and sign on."

Dick, smarting under the sting of the sergeant's tongue, went white, then red, then white again. It was only with a great effort that he controlled himself.

"If fighting's the whole game," he asked, facing the soldier squarely, "how's it happen you're

not with your company? You looked, at first, like the sort who'd rather scrap than yap."

The quick chuckle which rippled through the crowd added to the sergeant's quick temper and he stiffened like a ram-rod. "A soldier's first duty is to obey orders," he retorted, his voice crisp. "My colonel detailed me to this and we go where we're ordered and we're ordered where we're of the most good."

"Maybe that works outside the army," suggested Dick; "Maybe some other people have to do one thing when they'd rather do another. Think that over before you go shooting wild."

"Are you tryin' to teach me my business, young feller?"

Dal Tregressor's laugh rang out clear and true, and the anxious crowd turned toward him in utter amazement. "Looks like he's caught you in the wire, old son," he cried, catching the soldier's arm with his hand and tucking his other arm into Dick's elbow. "You both think you're firing Jack Johnsons, when all you're doing is letting off flares.

You're blowing up each other's trenches without doing a bit of good. Turn off the gas, both of you, before you poison a good field. You're starting a raid before you're organized for it, old fighting cock. Let's get right back into the dug-outs and line up your plan of campaign. Shelling hornets doesn't bag Boches."

The sergeant was quick to recognize the sense of this, and, already was as sorry as the boy over what had occurred. "I'd take that only from a chap who'd made good," he acknowledged. "Always did talk too much. But I'm going to talk a whole lot more before I'm through with you," he promised the crowd, "and, old Pat, here, is coming back with me."

"I'll try anything once," agreed Tregressor. "Let's dope out a real campaign first, though."

"You're on! But, say," exclaimed the sergeant before the three had gone twenty steps, "I'd started out to find an old bunkie when you fellows came into range. Know a chap named Tom Hall here?"

"I do," admitted Dick.

"Lead me to him, son. He'll straighten us all out, and give us a fresh start. Grandest old scout who ever chawed a bean, Tom. Know him well?"

"Fairly. He's my father."

The sergeant halted and his jaw dropped as he looked Dick over from head to foot. "Wallop me!" he said disgustedly. "Give me the butt strike! Let me eat my chevrons. And me standing there on a soap box telling Tom's boy he was afraid to fight! Say, youngster, you've proved you were a man once, do it again. Shake?"

"Sure!" cried Dick. "I didn't care — much. I'd settled it all with myself and nothing any one says matters much. But let's hurry. Father will be wild to see you."

"Then there'll be a couple of wild men loose in Kendallville. Hike along and hear a real American army fanning bee, Pat. Last time I saw Hall he was perched on the string piece of a Ponce wharf, batty with fever and bawlin' cause they wouldn't let him swim to Cuba and get a fight. And me

tryin' to tell that man's boy where he got off! Good night!"

Dal couldn't help laughing at the other's frank disgust, and, inside of thirty seconds, all three were swinging up the street, thoroughly friendly. As they went along, the sergeant was more and more amazed to notice how every one found something to say to Dick, and his headstrong action began to get back on his nerves. He saw that this youngster could make or break his work in the village. But then he remembered that it was Tom Hall's son, and things began to look rosy again.

"Hello!" he exclaimed, breaking off in the middle of a story about his old tent-mate. "There's a chap I've seen somewhere."

Both Dal and Dick glanced up. Toward them came Jim Scott, and, with him, his hands emphasizing his statements, walked Weinberg.

"What are they doing out of the factory this time of day?" queried Dick.

"Search me!" replied Dal. "Maybe they've

been transferred to the night shift. Heard the boss was planning some changes."

"Then there's trouble ahead for me," prophesied the boy.

"What's wrong? Say, I've sure run across that guy somewhere. Never could place faces. What's his name?"

"Scott."

The soldier shook his head but his eyes remained fixed on Jim. As the two parties came together, the sergeant hesitated, as if about to speak, but Scott looked at him squarely, and, with a gruff "Hello!" to Tregressor, walked past.

"Sure didn't know me," admitted the sergeant. "But I'll bet a week's pay I saw that gink hanging round a strike riot we discouraged out Idaho way. I can almost locate him, but his name wasn't Scott there. It was Delaney, or Delancy, or something like that. Who's that he's with? Looks like a German."

"Weinberg; foreman in the Kendall finishing room."

"Say!" he exclaimed. "What are those fellows doing, sleeping on their backs? This isn't the time to let Germans make our guns."

"He's been in town some time," announced Tregressor. "I felt the same way at first. He's been in this country some years, though; says he's for the U. S. against the Vaterland."

"You believe it, do you? Well, you've fought 'em; I've only read about 'em. But, believe me, if I saw Delaney and a German talking together in my town I'd keep an eye peeled every minute of all the time, 'specially if there happened to be a munitions plant handy."

"If you mean Scott, he's all right," asserted Dal. "You've mixed him up with some one else."

"Not on your life, Pat! I've got him fixed with that strike sure. I'll remember the rest before long. I remember that face now. If he wasn't a crook, he was mixed up with the other crooks some way."

"Dick knows him better than I do. He's all right, isn't he?" he asked the boy.

But, for once, Dick Hall had nothing to say.

CHAPTER VIII

AN ULTIMATUM

If Dick found nourishment for thought in Sergeant Baker's near-recognition of Scott, he found a more personal mental meal in Dal's announcement that Weinberg had been transferred to the night shift. For weeks the man had appeared unaware of his existence, yet, whenever Dick had chanced to meet him on the street, he was conscious of the keen eyes watching him slyly and he knew that Weinberg was not the sort to accept such a slight as Mr. Kendall had put upon him without some attempt at revenge.

For this reason he was all the more surprised when young Oscar Weinberg sidled up to him on the street that very night.

"'Lo, Dick! How's the boy?" he greeted.

"Able to eat soft food," retorted Dick with his usual good nature.

"That's good." Oscar fell into step. "Going down to the grocery," he announced. "The old man's been put on the night shift and needs cheese for his supper. He's a full-blooded cheese hound, my old man. I'll stroll along with you, if you don't mind."

"Come ahead," was the indifferent reply; "it's a public street."

It was not exactly the answer young Weinberg had hoped for, but he was clever enough to realize it was the sort he deserved. "Say," he exclaimed bluntly, "you licked me good once; my old man came back at you with a knock-out. Let's call it quits. I don't want any more trouble with you, Dick."

"You're not likely to have it, unless you start it."

"I've never started anything," he answered. "I like to be friends with every one."

"Good idea."

"Yeah," Oscar agreed, "'specially now. Say, Dick, you don't know how rotten it is to have a

German name. Every one thinks you're not an American."

"Wouldn't be exactly healthy for you round here, if you weren't."

"What do you mean?" There was a scarcely hidden note of anxiety in the question.

"Guess you know as well as I do."

"No one would start anything, would he?"

"If any one did, he'd find plenty of chaps here ready to finish it."

"You mean the home guard Kendall's organizing?" asked Weinberg.

"Perhaps. Possibly the crowd Dal Tregressor's gathered would lend a willing hand."

"No one expects any trouble here, do they?"

"Not's I know. But I guess Mr. Kendall's figured it's better to be prepared than sorry."

"That's Boy Scout stuff, isn't it?" queried Oscar.

"Come to think of it, partly. Good deal of Boy Scout 'stuff' appears to be general now-days."

"Hear Jim Farnsworth and Nick are wearing their uniforms round the factory."

"All the members of the younger patrols are to be in uniform from now on. Any one can call on any of 'em for anything they want, which has anything to do with the country or the town."

"Any chance for a fellow to join? I'd like to do my bit."

Dick looked at the boy in frank amazement. "Thought you claimed we were jokes," he said.

"Got to do something. Don't want to be the only guy in town who's not helping his country. Take me into the home guard, if you won't let me into the Scouts."

"You're too young. Anyway, I didn't say you couldn't join the Scouts. Any fellow can, who's square and will live up to the oath. We're not exclusive, we're inclusive."

"Can I really get in? Can I?" Oscar appeared as delighted as he was excited.

"Better talk with Mr. Tregressor; he'll fix it for you. My patrol's full."

"Carter, Defoe and old Longshanks have left town."

"You can count on one thing," declared Dick, "and that's that they are still members and are playing the game."

"Can I wear a uniform and do errands, if I'm taken in?"

"You can do what all of us are doing,— our bit."

"Me for it!" declared Oscar. "When's the best time to see Mr. Tregressor?"

"He's at home every evening. You can tell him I sent you."

"I'll do that little thing. I knew you'd be the chap to see. Later, you'll take me into the guard, I'll bet."

"I'd try one thing at a time," advised Dick. "You'll find the Scouts'll keep you busy enough, if you're in earnest."

"Watch me," he promised. "Here's the cheese cage. So long!" He waved his hand and darted into the store.

While Oscar Weinberg was apparently satisfied, Dick was not. He believed Oscar still held a grudge against him, was quite sure there was some-

thing behind this open attempt to bury the hatchet. Then came sudden shame. Why should he, who was trying so hard to do his part, look suspiciously on another fellow's effort? He felt like going back and apologizing to Oscar for doubting his willingness to do his bit, would have done so, had not the roar of the factory whistle sent him flying through the gates to avoid being late.

He stopped abruptly, eyes and mouth wide open, as the barrel of a repeating shot gun was banged against his chest. "Get back there," commanded a gruff voice; "show your pass."

With an effort, he pulled his shocked nerves together and looked up at the man behind the gun. "Why don't you scare a fellow to death?" he asked.

"Where's that pass?"

"Quit joshing and let me through. I'm almost late."

"Produce that pass, or move!" This time the voice was crisp. Dick made a hasty search for the thin leather case containing his identification card.

"There it is," he said, holding it out. "But for the love of Mike, don't be such a chump! You know me well enough; now I'm late."

"Serves you jolly well right, too," announced Dal Tregressor, coming up. "My men are on the job now and don't any of you people monkey with 'em, unless you're looking for big action."

"But have a little sense, Dal. When you all know a fellow —"

"We know a fellow at this fence when we see his card, and not till then. I've been put on a job, son, and I'm responsible. Now go on in and tell 'em you're late 'cause you got gay with a man behind a riot gun."

"And be guyed by the whole bunch? Not much!"

"That's up to you," chuckled Dal. "Hope you get a little discipline in the Aunt Lizzies some day."

"Don't you worry about the Aunt Lizzies," Dick laughed over his shoulder. "We'll have as good an outfit in the home guard as you've got in the Mill Yard Terriers."

"Hope neither of us have to prove it, old son," Dal called after him. "Look me up in lunch hour."

The more Dick thought over the incident, the more it tickled him. There was no possible question about Dal making good. He felt sorry for any trouble-maker who ran foul of the new organization. He was even more pleased at having countered that reference to the home guard as "the Aunt Lizzies" by dubbing Dal's outfit the "Terriers," for he was clever enough to realize that both names would stick and that they might become the basis of a very healthy rivalry between the two organizations.

His thoughts in this direction came to an abrupt end, however, as he came face to face with Weinberg when he was hurrying through the finishing room on his way to his own department. The big man made no attempt to get out of his path and the boy was forced to stop. "What is it that you do here?" he demanded sharply.

"On my way to my work."

"Then go by the proper route. I will not have

you about my department. Here, at least, I am of authority. I am not burned twice by the same little fire."

It was more than the lad could stand, and, then and there, he decided to have it out with Weinberg for all time. "Glad we feel the same way about it," he retorted. "You're not over me and you're going to put nothing over on me. If anything was stolen from your office, it must have been of mighty little value, or you'd have carried out the bluff and tried to get it back. You've got it in for me because my father sized you up, crack off the bat, and you're trying to settle that. As for my licking Oscar, he's been man enough to drop it and offer to be friends; now you cut it out. You've nothing to do with me and I certainly want nothing to do with you."

Weinberg's expression grew black and he took a quick step forward, as if to lay hands on the boy. Then he straightened to his full stature and an ugly sneer spread over his square face. "So!" he hissed. "It is that you accuse me of the lie! You say that to repay a boyish brutality, I stole from

myself, that I might accuse you. You shall learn now how a man should guard his honor. Come with me to Mr. Kendall."

If he had expected Dick to show fear, even to wince at the threat, he was grievously surprised. "Come with you to no one!" Dick retorted with open contempt. "I'm taking no orders from you, and, what's more, you can't make good on that bluff. Get out of my way; I'm late enough without wasting time."

With that he pushed past the astonished foreman and went toward his own room, whistling as if nothing had occurred. Coming in so late, it was necessary for him to buckle down to work, and, in his interest in keeping up with his schedule, he forgot Weinberg and his threat. For that reason his surprise was doubly great when the machines stopped at midnight and Jim Scott sauntered up to him.

"Why the ingrowing grouch of late, youngster?" he asked with all his old friendliness. "Being made one of the big chiefs in the home guard swelled you all out of shape?"

Here was a situation which the boy did not know how to meet. He had wiped Scott's name from his slate because it seemed certain, after Sergeant Baker's recognition, that there was a seamy side to Scott's past which dovetailed with his own suspicion and convinced him that there was something queer about this mysterious chap. Baker, too, had told how, when he had tried to get into another conversation with the man, he still insisted that he was not Delaney. Days before, Dick had concluded that the only way was to leave Scott severely alone. It was not only the kindest thing, but the safest for all concerned. Now Scott was forcing himself forward, a thing he had never done before in Kendallville.

Reluctantly, Dick laid down the gun he held and looked up into the half serious face. "I don't feel swelled up," he asserted, "and I've certainly no grouch against the general public."

"But a fine young one against me. All right, nurse it along, if it will get you anywhere. Only," he added seriously, "be sure it's going to get you

somewhere. Doesn't pay, if it won't, any more than going out of your way hunting trouble."

"I'd rather hunt trouble than duck it."

Scott glanced at the cool young face and smiled. "I guess you would," he agreed, "only you've a heap to learn about hunting it. Now, what's the big idea in this new run-in with Weinberg? Call it off, before you mess everything up."

"The only thing that's apt to get messed up's Weinberg," declared Dick; "I've stood all I'm going to from him. This is where he butts out for keeps. I'm not under him and I'm not going to take any more talk from him. If he sent you here, go back and tell him to make good. I'm not afraid of him."

"Suppose he didn't send me here?" suggested Jim. "Suppose I just came to you on my own hook, and asked you not to start a big row. Suppose I had almighty good reasons for doing it, but wanted to keep them under my hat for awhile?"

"I'd keep 'em there then," Dick retorted; "they don't interest me."

"They might — you and a lot of other people. I want this thing dropped, Dick. I know what will happen, if you push it, and it mustn't happen."

"Why?" he asked coldly.

"You told me to keep my reasons under my hat," Jim reminded him; "I'll take your advice; take mine, it's good; drop it; let Weinberg alone."

The boy turned squarely on him. "Is it going to save you from a mess if I do?" he asked.

"It's going to save me from a whole lot of worry if you cut it out," answered Scott ambiguously.

"You didn't care much about my feelings when you let me take the gaff. You've got a crust to ask me to stand much more. If he's got the goods on you, fight it out with him. Don't mix me up in it again; I'm through being the goat."

Scott's jaw squared and his keen eyes flashed dangerously. "Why, you poor simp!" he exclaimed, "do you think I'd ask you to cover my tracks? Do you think I'd come whimpering to you if Weinberg had the goods on me? I can do my own personal fighting, thanks."

"Then go do it."

To the boy's astonishment, the anger vanished from Scott's face as quickly as it had flared up. He began to laugh. "You sure got one dandy rise out of me! Guess things are getting on my nerves. Sorry."

"'S all right," agreed Dick gruffly, still at a complete loss.

"Good! Forget it, along with Weinberg. I'll explain later."

"I won't forget Weinberg. I've told you once that I've taken all I'm going to from him. He's forced this, and I'm going to see that he puts it through. He's got to prove I'm a thief, or acknowledge he's a liar. That's final."

Scott met his defiant gaze evenly, then slowly shook his head. "I'm blamed sorry you don't trust me," he said, "blamed sorry. You're going to make a pile of trouble."

"I'm going to stop people from calling me a thief," Dick corrected.

"For the last time, I ask you not to force things."

This time Dick's own jaw squared. "I've given you my answer," he stated; "it's Weinberg or me."

For perhaps ten seconds, Scott looked at him, then, with a shrug, turned away. "It's up to you," he said. "You're starting something which may be too big for us all to stop."

Dick watched him go in silence. He had no regret over the stand he had taken. He had gone through fire blindly for Stephen Kendall; any one else would have to give him better reasons for putting himself in a compromising position than Scott had done. It had all been as vague as it was distasteful, and Dick was astounded that Jim had had the audacity to approach him with such mist-hung requests. It added nothing to his valuation of the man, yet, in spite of it all, he still felt that same inexplicable liking for him.

One effect the incident did have, however. It left the boy with a desire to be alone. For this reason he ate his lunch at the bench, and did not hunt up Dal. Somehow or other, he felt he could not play

a whole-hearted part in the jokes he knew Dal would start about the two guards.

Yet others had not been as inactive. Hardly had the machines started before a message came for Dick to report in the office. Dropping his work, he found old Robinson, told him of the summons and started for the other building.

This time he gave little thought as to why he had been sent for. He took it for granted that Mr. Kendall had some new plan for the guard, and wanted to get it under way, so that all might be working smoothly when the company was called out for the first time. The surprise was all the greater when he found Weinberg standing in silence by Mr. Kendall's desk. "You sent for me, sir?" he said.

"Yes," came the quiet answer, but it was not followed by the now customary invitation to pull a chair close to the desk. "Mr. Weinberg says that he has a complaint to make against you, Hall. As he states that it is serious, I thought it but just to you both that he make it before you."

The boy nodded gravely, but, as he turned toward Weinberg, he saw an expression, far different from the indignation he had expected, steal across the foreman's face. It was a look such as might have come to the eyes of some slinking wild beast long held from its prey, but now at last sure that its victim was in reach of its claws. The next instant the big, powerful features were again normal and the awaited anger flared.

"This I shall not tolerate," he exclaimed indignantly. "It is the right of a foreman to have the confidence of his employer."

"Nevertheless, Weinberg, you will grant me the right to conduct this factory according to my own ideas," came the calm retort. "If you care to proceed, you may."

"If it was that I am a maker of trouble," continued Weinberg, "I should refuse on the instant. I have worked here two years; I have done work that was good. I know well the trouble which would come to the company in this, the hour of its need, if I should do as some

men would do and throw the gage of battle at your feet."

"Um! Come to the point."

"It is because I have done what I have done and am what I am that I shall no longer tolerate the insolence of that boy. This night he came into my department and told me to my face that I uttered lies. Is it that the Kendall Arms Company considers that the proper conduct of its affairs permits such insults to its foremen?"

Stephen Kendall wheeled about in his swivel chair. "What have you to say for yourself, Hall?"

"That's he's told the truth as far as he's gone," he stated, disgusted at such a false statement of fact, and determined now to see the thing to the end, in spite of Jim Scott or any one. "I was going through the finishing department because I was late and was taking the shortest way. He stopped me and again accused me of being a thief. I told him that he couldn't make good on that old bluff and he threatened what's happened now. If it's not

asking too much, Mr. Kendall, let's have this stealing stuff settled for good. He claims I've stolen something; what's he lost?"

"That seems a perfectly fair question, Weinberg," he demanded; "answer it."

For the fraction of a second the thick lips parted but then the big head shot forward. "My watch and chain," he answered.

To Stephen Kendall's amazement, Dick laughed. "You must have forgotten to re-steal it, Weinberg; the chain's hanging out of your pocket."

"It's another watch and chain. See, again," he flared, "he calls me not only a liar, but this time a thief from myself. Always he has tried to make trouble for me; I am through with it. I demand his discharge."

"You what?" asked Mr. Kendall sharply.

"I demand his instant discharge."

"Oh! I thought I might have misunderstood that word the first time."

"I use it in the full strength of it."

"Then you've made a second false step. We've

never listened to a 'demand' from a workman yet; I don't intend to begin now."

Weinberg squared around, his bluster gone, his whole attitude as cool as that of the man he faced. "That boy shall be discharged," he stated, "or —"

"Never mind the threat," broke in Stephen Kendall sharply. "He's proved you a liar once; you've no need to endorse the charge. You're the one who's discharged."

It was Weinberg who laughed this time, and it was laughter which contained both contempt and triumph. "You make the issue at a time when it is to you critical," he declared. "My men shall have an answer to this, your high handed methods. We shall test out your so valiant-strength. There are men, wiser far than you, who listen to my word."

Mr. Kendall came to his feet and his eyes met those of the threatening workman unflinchingly. "If you're threatening a walk-out," he said, "you're wasting breath. I know my men. If you're merely threatening trouble, you've come to the right place

to find it. Get out of here; we're through with you."

"*Aufwiedersehen!*" corrected Weinberg and walked out of the office.

CHAPTER IX

THE MARCH PAST

For once, at least, Weinberg's word proved good. Twenty men of the day shift walked out during the next morning. The old residents of Kendallville were ablaze with resentment, and real trouble might have come on the instant from what they called disloyalty to the government, had not old "Bullet" Kendall himself passed out the word that nothing would be allowed to interfere with the running of the plant. When "Bullet" spoke, Kendallville had learned to sit back, and wait in silence.

If Weinberg could show such unexpected strength among the day force, all wondered what might happen when six o'clock came, and the big majority of the new employees were put to the test. If they backed up the now invisible ex-foreman, the Ken-

dall company would be hard pressed to live up to its contracts. Every day counted, and every one in the village knew how heavy that count was.

At noon Stephen Kendall's gray racing car came rushing down from the great house on the hill, the owner himself at the wheel. If they had expected old "Bullet" to choose the field for any possible action, they were certain that Stephen would provide that action. It began to look as if things were about to happen.

The first surprise came when the big car slid to a stop in front of George North's bank and Mr. Kendall went in, his step as jaunty, and his smile as carefree as if he had not spent the entire morning at the long distance instead of in sleep. Then came another rumor on the heels of the multitude already afloat, and it was followed by Mr. North's appearance on the street. Soon boys in the uniforms of Scouts began to weave in and out of the little crowds, whispering a word here and a command there. Dick Hall, too, had had his orders and they were being swiftly spread by the youngsters, who

had dropped everything at the urgent call. Yet, with all this undercurrent, all that any one knew was that the home guard was called to meet that afternoon. There could be nothing revolutionary in that; old "Bullet" was too canny to risk the suppression of possible riots to a quickly gathered, and more quickly instructed, counter-mob.

It was nearly four o'clock when between twenty and twenty-five men were seen straggling through the factory gates. The strikers greeted them with a wild yell, but it quickly died away when they were recognized as amongst the oldest of the Kendall men. Without comment, they strolled on down the street and entered the town hall. Hardly had they disappeared before George North came out of the bank, and turned in the same direction. A dozen of the storekeepers and their clerks followed. Then boys in khaki began to appear and then to disappear into the old white building. Of them all, Dick, the root of the trouble, was the only one to be greeted with a jeer, as he came running down from a quick conference with the calm old min-

ister who saw his training bearing good fruit once more.

Probably there were sixty in the hall when Stephen Kendall suddenly stepped out on the platform. "Attention!" he commanded crisply. "We've a good deal to do."

His bearing, more than his tone, brought an instantaneous hush. Men dropped into the nearest chairs. Stephen Kendall came nearer the edge of the platform. "Kendallville was among the first," he announced, "to take up this idea of forming a home guard. That we've been slow in organizing has been due to my negligence, but, before a formal step is taken, my father and I wish it distinctly understood that no untoward event is behind this meeting. The Kendalls will guard their own."

"We're behind you, Steve, if any of them start anything."

Kendall turned quickly, located the speaker and frowned. "I know you are, Harry," he stated, "but we're here to think of bigger things than the individual."

"You're boss, Steve. We'll follow you."

"But say the word, when you want something started, old man."

"Three cheers for Mr. Kendall!" thrilled a boyish treble.

The cheers came with a vim and at least served as a vent for pent up emotions. As the noise died out, Mr. Kendall's voice again rose sharply. "Let's get down to business," he half suggested, half commanded. "Some thought I should act as captain —"

"You bet!"

"Make it unanimous."

"Three cheers for Capt. Kendall."

Again the noise drowned the speaker's voice but the flush which came over his handsome face showed his honest pleasure in this proof of their confidence. "Richard Hall and George North have been suggested as lieutenants."

It was the men from the factory who led the demonstration this time. "I take it these selections meet approval," said Mr. Kendall with a smile.

"We'll go ahead with this organization. George, you and Dick come up here."

It would be hard to say whether the diffident banker or the modest factory lad was the more uncomfortable over the second demonstration which greeted their march to the platform. For the first time Dick began to suspect that he had a good many friends, and it gave him a comfortable feeling inside and a confidence in himself which made his step firmer.

"My idea," Mr. Kendall began again, "is to start with sixty members, but our limit will be one hundred. We will have drills twice a week. Service is entirely voluntary. Each man who signs the muster roll agrees to obey the commands of his superiors and observe military discipline. Failure to do this will result in dishonorable discharge. If I've outlined the idea sufficiently, I'll declare the muster roll open for signatures. Dick, you'll find paper and pens in the drawer. Act as mustering officer."

A crowd started forward, but in the rear of the

hall a man sprang to a chair. "Do we get guns and uniforms?" he called.

"Certainly."

"I've got my all staked here in the village," he stated. "I know what this home guard may mean before this war is over. I'll be one of five to pay for the guns."

"Bully for you, Solly!"

"Knew he'd loosen sometime."

"Fine!" exclaimed Mr. Kendall enthusiastically. "That's real Kendallville spirit. But you're too late; some one has already contributed a sum which will cover our complete equipment."

For a moment there was silence. All had expected to do their part. Then came a murmur which grew to a roar. "'Bullet'! 'Bullet'!" they shouted. "Three cheers for 'Bullet' and the Kendall Guards!"

Stephen Kendall had meant to keep this new example of his father's public spirit a secret, but he saw it was as useless to attempt to check their cheers, as it was to try to keep them from giving

the new company his family name. "Thanks for him," he laughed joyously. "I claim the honor of signing my name as the first member of the Kendall Guards."

He stooped over the table, wrote his signature with a firm hand, and held out the pen to North. "You're next, George," he said, "then Dick."

"How about the rest of us?"

"Age before beauty," suggested one of the older men jokingly.

"Good idea · that," agreed Mr. Kendall. "George, line up your crowd; Dick, send your chaps to the back of the hall."

"Who looks after us?" queried one of the factory men whimsically. "You can't freeze us out of this game."

"Let them start the list," suggested North; "they've neither age nor beauty."

From George North, who seldom joked about anything, it was the exact touch needed. It seemed to put them all in even more of a mood of good fellowship and to wipe out any possible ground for

rivalry. "But, remember," warned Stephen Kendall, as the men crowded up to the table, "none of you need sign. Everybody's to act on his own judgment and personal desire."

"Sure we be!" shouted Mike Maloney, a big Irish machinist. "Give us a couple of thim pens, Cap."

After each had signed the roll, he returned to his seat, and, when the last youngster had blotted his signature, Dick rose. "Captain," he announced, saluting, "I have to report fifty-seven men present."

"Begorra!" cried the enthusiastic Maloney. "Teach me th' monkey-shine, bhoy. 'Tis foine I'll look doin' ut. Is ut with the left fist, so?"

"Order in the ranks!" commanded Mr. Kendall, laughing as loudly as any of them. "You'll learn it fast enough, Mike, and do it, too, when you address Lieut. Hall."

"Do I make th' little song an' dance when I spake to that gossoon?"

"You do."

"So be ut!" agreed Maloney promptly. "I've pledged to obey ordhers."

"Attention!" Kendall's tone told them that the play time was past. "Baker, the recruiting sergeant, has offered us his help in drilling the company while he's here," he announced. "I wish we had a regular all the time."

"What's the matter with Tom Hall?" suggested a man in the front row.

Dick looked at Mr. Kendall. "I'm afraid he's not up to it," he confessed sorrowfully. "He's broken-hearted because he couldn't come, but he said to tell you he'd be mighty glad to give us what he called 'non-com.' school."

"Good! The captain and lieutenants will report to Mr. Hall to-morrow afternoon at four for preliminary instructions. For the rest of the afternoon, I am going to divide the company into three squads. I'll take the mill men, Lieut. North the town men and Lieut. Hall the Scouts, and the younger fellows. We will line up by fours and march to the end of Main street and back."

In a flash they saw the test he was putting them to. It meant facing the town. It meant marching past their friends, and, more, it meant marching past the strikers who might become something else at any second. It was Maloney who came slowly to his feet, his face grim. "We're ready, sor," he announced simply.

Dick, with a dozen members of the Scouts to leaven his detachment, knew his task would be the simplest, and, long before the other two squads were in line, his was formed. Stepping across the hall, he reported to his captain in a steady voice. Then, in an undertone, "Give us the right of line, sir," he begged; "my fellows understand discipline. They'll be steady, if anything's started."

"I'd planned to, Dick. Maloney acts as my first sergeant and I head the company. You and I are the two they're after, lad; we'll face the music together."

"Thank you, sir."

But Stephen Kendall knew what the little tremble in the lad's voice meant and each knew that

he could count on the other until the very end.

It was a strangely self-conscious crowd which marched down the echoing stairs and out into the spring sunlight which flooded the sidewalk. "Fours right, march!" Stephen Kendall's voice rang out clear and true as he reached the center of the street and wheeled south. "Fours right, march!" repeated Dick without a quaver. Yet both saw the crowd ahead, heard the low murmur of surprise and then the quick, high jeer.

"Steady!" warned the boy. "Eyes front."

"It's strike-breakers," yelled some one ahead. "Rock 'em! Kill 'em!"

Kendall saw the group surge out from the sidewalk, recognized Schwartz, Weinberg's closest friend, and knew what it meant. "Close up!" he ordered.

"Close up!" repeated Dick and heard Mr. North's equally steady, "Close up!" followed by Maloney's booming, "Close up, bhoys!"

No one had ever called Stephen Kendall a coward,

but, had there been a side street, between his men and the snarling crowd ahead, he would have wheeled into it with a joyous heart. The fight at the plant was his; the thought of marching these clear-eyed boys and the loyal townsmen straight into the jaws of a riot, sickened him. His only relief was that they were unarmed. Had they carried the rifles already in the Kendall stables, he knew that Maloney and the stalwarts from the shops would see to it that the gutters ran red. He had but an instant to choose his course, to balance the reputation of the Kendalls for never surrendering against the fair name of Kendallville. "Halt!" he ordered.

Dick Hall heard, and, hearing, understood. And in that instant he, too, weighed the alternative. He had a clear vision of a grim fight or a factory which was arming his country standing idle. Turning as he marched, he looked into the eyes of the first four lads. "Take it standing up," he said; "forward, march!"

Mr. Kendall's face went white with anger at this

open disobedience of his orders, but, before he could speak, Dick was close to his side. "The right's with us," he said simply. "Most of us are Scouts; we're going through."

Another change came over Stephen Kendall's face. "Not alone," he stated. "Let them start it."

It was then that Kendall saw Schwartz stoop and pick up a stone. His back stiffened. He knew that he would be the bull's-eye of the target but he marched on, head up, arms swinging at his side, a smile on his lips and his fine eyes alight, every inch a man.

The unwavering advance of the silent column was not what the strikers had expected. Schwartz knew that the time had come to act. Kendall was the one man he wanted down. With him out of the way, everything would be simple. "Come on!" he roared and his arm went back to hurl the rock at the undefended head.

But just as it went back, a flying figure crashed into him, paused, wavered from the shock, whirled round in the vacant space between the mob and the

advancing Guard and came to a stand straight, perfectly poised, ready. "Who opens the ball?" he challenged, his cold eyes sweeping the crowd. "Look!" he cried. And, as if out of the empty air, a blued automatic appeared in his hand. "You helped make this; you whelps, are you afraid of your handiwork?"

"Kill him!"

Dal Tregressor laughed as he took one step forward and there was a note in that laugh which sent cold chills up Dick Hall's spine. "So it's you, Schwartz, is it?" he sneered. "Where's your running mate?"

"Get back! Don't shoot!" The bravado was dying out of the mob.

"I want Schwartz," declared the lone man. "Come out here, you yellow dog!" He dropped his gun into his pocket and leaped forward. "Come out here," he snapped, gripping the big man by the shoulder and jerking him into the street. "Stand still, the rest of you."

Schwartz, trembling with a very vivid fear, looked

this way and that for a road of escape, but Dal Tregressor shook him like a terrier shakes a rat. "Look there, you sneaking Hun!" he ordered. "Those men are doing their bit. You don't see their flag; I don't see it; but they see it, waving there above their heads. I've been over the top without the colors. I know what it means. Take off your hat and salute their flag!"

His own heels came together with a click and his one whole hand snapped to his cap. Like a statue, he stood there at the salute until the last of Maloney's men had marched past in utter silence. And, at his side stood the hatless, white-faced leader of the mob.

But, as the company swung on up the street, cheers began to break out on either side and Dal Tregressor, drawing a long breath, turned to his still rigid companion.

"There's a train leaving in ten minutes," he announced; "get on and see how far it goes."

Then he turned and walked to the factory without so much as a glance at the cheering crowds.

CHAPTER X

A MIDNIGHT FIRE

Dal Tregressor leaned against the corner of the small frame building which housed those of his watchmen temporarily off duty and counted the slow strokes of the factory clock in its unseen tower high overhead. A picture of idle indifference, he was, in reality, very much on the alert. From this point he could follow the line of arc lights more than half way around their circle, and was within call of most of his men who paced their posts within the shadows.

Yet he was more intent in watching the basement door of the old shop. Hardly had the bell ceased its booming when some one came out, and, without pausing, headed directly toward him. Tregressor, his eyes as keen as a hawk's, saw, but hid his knowledge under an even thicker mask of carelessness.

"Wake up, Dal!" Dick was grinning as he laid a hand on his friend's arm.

"Oh!" The man pretended great astonishment. "Why," he exclaimed, as if vastly relieved, "it's the Aunt Lizzies' second in command! My gracious, how you did frighten me, Lieutenant! I must have been asleep."

"Oh, back up! I saw you turn your head away as I opened the door."

"Little bright eyes, the night owl!" teased Tregressor. "When are the Lizzies going to pull another show?"

"That's right, laugh it off! We all know it would have been about our last if you hadn't appeared like the movie hero in the last reel."

"Drop that. How are things going inside?"

"The way you handled Schwartz seemed to put a crimp in a lot of back bones. Most of the men I thought would be missing to-night are polishing steel with their noses. But, Dal, there's one chap out I didn't expect would quit. That's why I sent you word."

"Well, who is it? The night's half gone and I don't know yet."

"Scott."

"Sergeant Baker's friend, eh? Um! Leave it to an old non-com. to spot a wrong 'un."

The boy looked quickly about to make sure none was near. "Dal," he announced, "I believe there's more going on round here that even you've suspected. Scott used to be mighty chummy with me; I've always had a sneaking liking for the chap. Even now, I can't believe what I almost know."

"If you know anything, spill it."

"I'm going to. I hate the idea, but I guess it's the right thing to do. Even then, it doesn't make things line up."

"I'm no mind reader," suggested Dal mildly.

"It was when I got into that first row with Weinberg. Jim Scott went into Weinberg's office. I saw him. Of course I didn't see him take anything. I don't even know what was taken. But I've got to believe that, whatever was taken, was taken by him."

"Does he know you saw him go in there?"

"Yes."

"Ever say anything about it to him?"

Dick nodded. "Asked him if he could think of any way to square me, or something like that. Thought I'd give him a chance to play the game."

"Wouldn't he do it?"

"No."

"Steve Kendall know this?"

"No. I've never told any one. I couldn't prove anything against him; I know how it hurts to be suspected, when you're innocent."

Tregressor took a quick turn into the shadows and back, his head bowed. "Doesn't hang together," he announced shortly. "Can't see why he'd back up Weinberg now, by striking, if he'd steal something from him a couple of months ago."

"Maybe Weinberg's got it on him."

"Maybe. Don't know Scott well, but he struck me as the sort who'd scrap rather than quit."

"The sergeant said he'd seen him mixed up with a gang of strikers out West. Dal, I believe there's

a plot on to put this plant out of business. There's plenty of spies in this country and they want our munition factories shut down. Weinberg was using me as an excuse. I'm as sure of it as I am that I'm talking with you. What's more, Mr. Kendall knows it."

"Has he told you so?" demanded Dal sharply.

"No."

"Then don't quote him," he advised. "We're paid to do our work, not his thinking. If he does suspect anything, and is keeping it mum, you bet he's got a good reason for doing it and he doesn't want any of us talking wild. But, between you and me and the family keepsakes, I'm thinking the same way. I've orders to halt every one who comes near that fence. If they don't halt when my men tell 'em to, well — they halt," he finished grimly.

"But where does Scott come in?"

"If he comes in at all, he'll show up mighty soon," prophesied Dal. "If we've guessed right, the party's just begun. That strike flivvered, but if they're in earnest no grand-stand plays are going

to scare them off. I've got my gang on edge, and, believe me, they're good huskies. But I must have ten more. There're spots still unguarded. You get busy with the Lizzies. Get Kendall to let 'em have those guns he's hidden and tip off every Boy Scout to keep his ear close to the ground and his mouth shut unless he's talking to my father or you. I'm going the rounds again, so eat your grub. If I get a tip about Scott, I'll pass it on."

Dick went back into the shop, more uneasy than ever at the climax of his own troubles. But Tregressor walked his rounds with anxious face. All that the boy had said bore out what Mr. Kendall had disclosed when he asked him to undertake the work. He believed that trouble was fast approaching, and he thrived on that sort of food. Yet one thing puzzled him; he could not solve Scott's evident attempt to run both with the fox and the hounds, and he would have given much to meet the man alone in one of the dark corners of the big yard for which he was responsible.

Two hours more and suspicion turned to cer-

tainty. The night was still and slow, low-hanging clouds clung to the top of the great mountain at the valley's head. In the deep shadows only the twinkling rows of lights in the windows of the factory buildings bore witness that the village was in the world of the living. Certainly none could have denied that peace brooded over Kendallville.

Then, low at first, like the drone of an angry hive, but, growing, with a whine, into full-throated blast, the great siren above the power house roared out. The shadows seemed to waver under the strength of its cry; the buildings to tremble, the blackness on the distant mountain to shake. Men paused, tools poised above the work in hand, or shot forth reaching fingers for the levers of their machines. Then, above the new-born whirr of the alarm bells, rang the sharp, short cry, "Fire!"

In the yard, Dick heard the shouts of watchmen, followed by the pound of rushing feet. In the long shop, the calm orders of old Robinson broke the momentary hush. "Get everything under cover before the sprinklers start," he ordered. "We don't

know where it is, but it ain't here yet. Fire squad file out! We men who are left behind will stick by the guns awhile."

Dick went down the stairs on the jump. As his leader came to the entrance he snatched the nozzle of the coiled hose from its rack. The rest caught hold. With a yell, they rushed for their hydrant station. Now the whistle boomed in short, angry blasts. Then, at the north end of the yard, a dull, flooding glow began to spread and its light stole slowly over the walls of the huge new shop. "It's the store house!" panted Dick. "The old shop'll go next, then this. Wind's this way."

"Save your breath, youngster," advised the man behind him. "Hit it up!"

Across the yard came rushing a hatless, coatless man. "Hurry with that hose!" he called. "Get the water in there. Fight it from this side. It's a bad one."

"Wind's toward the main shop, sir."

Stephen Kendall waved a hand as he dashed past. "Come on," he ordered. "Keep this side. You'll

get trapped between the pond and wall, if you work from the west."

They whirled out the hose as they ran, trying to keep pace with him. They saw him stop, as he met the men from the third floor, and heard him order them to keep a stream playing over the new shop to protect that. The night grew brighter; the glare lit the whole yard. Yellow clouds of smoke whirled out through the exploding windows of the long, one-storied storehouse beside the spur track.

The hose in their hands squirmed, writhed, stiffened. With a hiss, the stream leaped out, curved, straightened, struck the window on the east side with a crash. "Hold 'er steady!" commanded the leader.

Dick, with two others, held the fighting nozzle, crouching to avoid the thick smoke. The heat slapped at their faces like waves slap the side of a boat. Their breath came sharp and rasping. From left and right came sharp orders. They heard the roar of two more streams above the flames. The first and fourth floor squads were in action. "It's

a terror," panted Dick to the man at his side.

"Yup! I'm roasting."

"We can stick awhile."

"You bet!"

They gulped and settled their feet more firmly. It seemed as if the water was winning. "Here comes the town company," gasped Dick; "I hear the bells."

"Tregressor!" roared Kendall's voice above the din. "Tregressor!"

"Yes, sir?"

"Keep that fire department out."

"Already 'tended to, sir. Double guards on all posts."

"Right. Steady that No. 1 stream!"

Dick heard the two men at his sides swear under their breath. "There's been crooked work here," he offered; "that's why he won't let any outsiders in. He's trusting it all to us."

"By gad, you're right!"

"Hurroo!" From the source of No. 1 stream Maloney's big voice rose above the racket like a

trumpet. "'Tis Kendall men an' Kendall guns agin th' Hun, bhoys. Lay on!"

If anything more had been needed to hold them to their work, the knowledge that Stephen Kendall relied on them alone was it. There was not a man there who would not have suffocated at his post before he would have retreated one step. "It's gaining on us," gasped Dick. "Watch those flames. They're creeping through the whole building."

He heard some one behind him in the smoke. "You men all right?" asked Kendall.

"Yes, sir."

"Don't stick too long."

"Oh, Mr. Kendall!"

"Here."

Tregressor came plowing in as if he thrived on smoke and heat, "Pardon interference, sir," he cried; "look's like a case of action front, if we're to save the first line trench. If we could smash in that double door, and get the water in, it would drive the flame back to the rear, where it started."

"No man can live in that heat, though."

"I've lived through worse'n that," volunteered Dal. "I've one good arm left; give me an ax."

"No."

Dick heard and his hands stole back along the hose until he felt those of the man behind him. "I'm all in," he said; "be back in a sec."

Out through the smoke he scooted, but low to the ground to escape both smoke and notice, then wheeled eastward for a few gulps of untainted air. Mr. Kendall's order had been to Dal Tregressor. Dick thought of the cases of automatics piled inside that burning building. He had no idea how many were there; how many might have been shipped out on the midnight train. He only knew that some were left and that each one might mean the life of a soldier at the front. Against many lives, he staked but one.

"I want that," he cried, snatching an ax from the hands of a man who was hurrying toward the rear of the building.

"Give that back!"

"Can't. Need it."

For just an instant he paused to size up his problem for the last time. The line of flaming windows told the story all too plainly. The northern half of the building was already a seething furnace. The blaze was sweeping through, and, from the southern end, its leap across the narrow gap to the new shop would be the work of a second. The big double door was the key to the fire. But the walls of the two buildings were so close that none could man hose between them without roasting, should the flames lick through. Nor, from the comparative safety of an acute angle, could the doors be smashed in by weight of water. When they gave before the flames, it would be too late. It was ax work first, then oblique streams which should work slowly in as they drove the fire back.

He measured his distance as he drew long, deep breaths. Then the remembrance of a thing Mr. Tregressor had told the Beaver patrol came to his aid. Whipping off his coat, he "slushed it" in a puddle made by a leaking joint of hose. Then, ax in one hand and dripping jacket in the other, he

leaped for the narrow gap, his eyes fixed on the six steps he must climb to win the broad platform before that fast-locked furnace door.

They saw him when it was too late. "Oh, lord!" gulped Tregressor. "Give me that hose."

He felt an equally steady hand settle beside his. "Work to the front, Dal," gulped Stephen Kendall. "Why didn't I go!"

Together they worked the heavy line southward, stumbling, coughing, gasping, utterly unconscious that they were working nearer and nearer the building, utterly unconscious of everything except that slender figure, its head hidden in steaming, dripping cloth, its arms flaying that bolted door.

Twice they saw Dick falter, stagger, recover, as they sent the water crashing against the wall just above his head, and so revived him with its saving spray. Again and again they called to him to come back, but the roar of the flames and the crash of the ax on the charred wood, drowned their voices.

"It's when he smashes through that he'll get it," groaned Dal. "The flames will lick him up."

"I know it."

"Can you hold alone? I'll go over the top."

"Stay here." There was no questioning the authority in Kendall's voice now. He was the master of mill and men alike. "Maloney!" he shouted. "You, Bailey!"

"Yes?"

"Yes, sor?"

"Bring up your hose on the jump. If that door gives, play into it. It's his only chance."

"Yes, sir."

"You've said ut, sor."

"It's giving. Steady, boy! Steady there. He's down again! No, he's up!"

"Mike Maloney!"

"Sor?"

"Here."

The big Irishman came leaping through the smoke to Kendall's side.

"She's going in with his next blow. Steady, now! Drop a curtain across that door."

"Grab hold, Mike." Kendall heaved the heavy

nozzle into the powerful hands. "Dal, carry on!"

Dal Tregressor's exclamation was as sharp as the crack of a pistol. But Maloney wailed like a banshee as he saw Stephen Kendall leap toward the platform which spread like a stage before the eddying maw of the furnace which flared open in the very face of the tottering boy. But, between them, they held firm and added the crash of their stream to the weight of the other two which smashed across the wall of crimson flame.

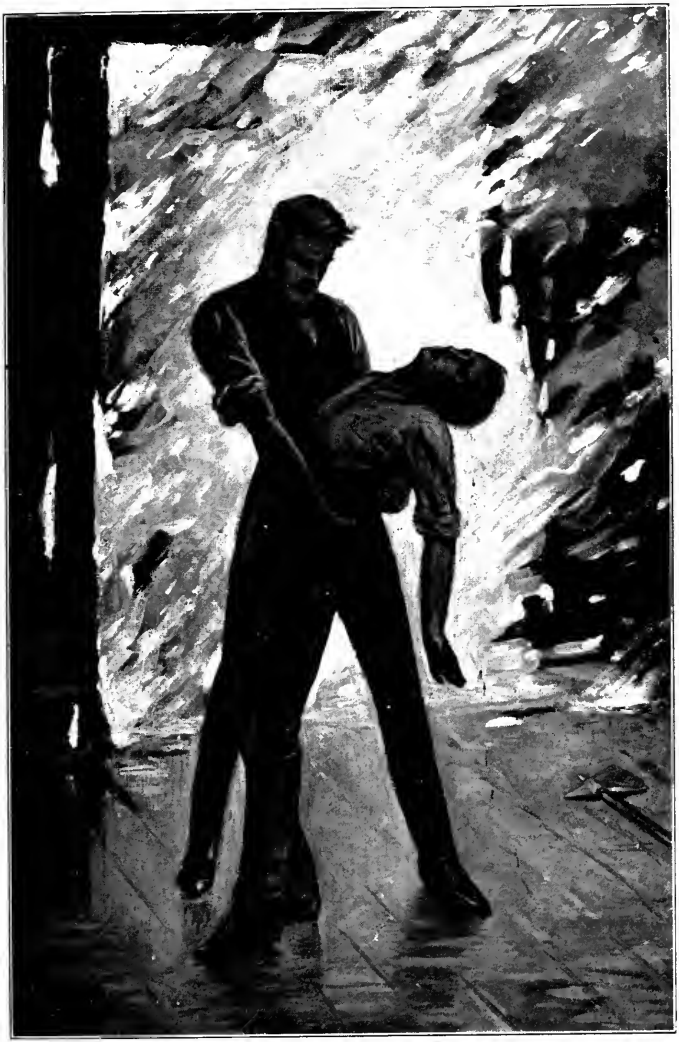
"Steady all!" Dal was himself again, cool, resourceful, game; his attention entirely on the two black silhouettes against the red, seething curtain which hung where the doors had been.

He saw Dick wilt down into a shapeless heap, but had foreseen that. It was Kendall alone for both. He saw him stumble as he cleared the steps: knew that the heat had hit him; saw his arms go up over his face; saw him lunge ahead.

"He's down!" groaned Maloney.

"He's not. He's got him."

"Saints give 'um strength!"



"KENDALL . . . HALF LIFTED HIM"

Kendall stooped in his stride, clutched at the boy, half lifted him, slipped, caught his balance, slipped again, staggered, fell. They saw him try to roll toward the further edge of the platform, stop, lie inert.

Tregressor grasped the idea. "Let 'em have it!" he yelled at the top of his voice. "All together. Let 'em have the water. Now!"

The three great streams centered into one and that one caught man and boy in its saving arms and swept them on its triple head out of the roaring jaws of death. It was not heroic, it was not inspiring, it would not have moved even a reporter to eulogy but, as the two dropped out of danger over the far edge, Mike Maloney lifted his grim, strong face to the smoke-hung sky and gave low-voiced thanks, while Dal Tregressor's one good hand brushed across his eyes.

CHAPTER XI

BIG BROTHERS

DAL TREGRESSOR strolled into the sitting-room of the Hall home with the air of a man who has nothing at all on his mind. "Hello, Lizzie!" he called cheerily; "when you going to put the rookies through the manual?"

Dick turned slowly among the pillows propped behind his back and a happy smile spread across his blistered face. "Gee, but I'm glad to see you!" he exclaimed. "It's bully in you to come."

"Sure! That's why I came." He pulled a chair close to the lounge and sat down languidly. "I make it a special point to make afternoon calls. Habit I got in England. They used to give us afternoon tea, sometimes. Where's your father?"

"Mr. Kendall sent his limousine for him an hour ago."

"If the Lizzies are plotting another review, I'd better get back down town," declared Dal, in a worried tone, but made no move to rise. "Glad Kendall didn't send the plush lined tank for me. I've hunted a dugout every time any one's yelled my name all day. Suppose he'll get my range sooner or later."

"What's up?"

"That's so," confessed Dal; "you were rather disinterested last night and didn't get the laugh. You see, the big boss was about to yell to Mike when we got his range with that hose."

"I don't understand," confessed Dick. "But, from what father's told me, you and Mr. Steve saved my life. It's not much of a joke to me."

"Sure not! Steve didn't think so, either. Maloney and I caught him flush with his mouth open. He swore we tried to drown him. Mad? Wow! Say, you oughter have heard him! He coughed like a fire engine."

"You're not going to laugh it off, neither you nor Mr. Kendall. I know what you both did and

some day I'm going to show you both how grateful I am."

"Now forget all that sort of stuff," advised Dal. "Any man keeps his head in a tight corner. You're a man and you keep yours when you see Kendall. He doesn't want thanks. It would make him uncomfortable. He did a big thing in going in there for you, but he doesn't want to talk about it. I know," he added with an amused chuckle; "he told me to shut up."

The lad was thoughtful for a moment. Certainly if any one knew how another would feel under the circumstances he had described, it was this veteran of the Princess Pats. "How'd they get the fire out?" he asked with a sigh.

"Cinch, after what you'd done. Edged farther and farther in front of the door and fought it back to where it started. The whole shooting match would have gone but for you, youngster. As it was, there wasn't much burned but empty packing cases."

"Leave me out of it and go on."

Dal grinned appreciatively. "I'm getting so I'm

not crazy about being told what to say and what not to say," he confessed, "so I guess I won't tell you how the thing started."

"Dal! Do you know? Tell me?"

His eagerness was so real that Tregressor leaned forward and gently pushed him back among the pillows. "If you couldn't keep most of your hair and all your eyebrows on," he observed, "don't get so heated you'll scorch off what fuzz is left."

"Tell me."

"Right O!" He settled down again, and, crossing his legs, looked with a new soberness at his friend. "Something's mighty rotten in other places besides that famous state of Denmark," he said. "That fire was incendiary."

"What do you mean?"

"Some one set it."

"How do you know?"

"For one thing, I suspected it after our talk; for another, I discovered how it was done."

"Where? How? Why?"

"Beginning with the first careless query," said

Dal with a smile; "in the back corner of the building,— the northwest one, the only dark place in the yard and the one I was most afraid of, because the men who had strung the new lights failed to get up a good one there, for some reason or other."

"Why didn't you have your men watch it?"

"Kendall asked me that very same question after we'd gotten him safely ashore last night. I did have it watched. I put a good man there. His only fault was that his head was softer than what hit it."

"Dal!"

"Exactly." He nodded soberly as he looked into the wide eyes opposite. "Some one laid him out cold. We found him unconscious."

"When?"

"After the fire was under control and I took another scouting trip round the edge of things. Some one must have climbed the fence when his back was turned as he walked his sentry-go, laid for him in the shadow of the building, reached out and walloped him from behind when he'd gone past again."

"How do you know?"

"I'm a good guesser. Some one had to bring in the gasoline can we found near him, and some one had brought it in full and put a match to it after spilling it through a busted window. It was nervy and no one would have done it who hadn't been some desperate."

Dick's brows were drawn down in troubled thought. "It's some of the Weinberg gang," he stated; "it's a follow-up of that strike. Get Weinberg and you've got the whole outfit."

Tregressor nodded slow assent. "Where do I get him?" he asked. "Tell me that and I'll do the rest."

"Has he disappeared?"

"He had this morning. His wife and boy were at the house but the old bird had gone to get another job. Or, at least, that's what his wife said. The kid asked after you. I don't like that kid."

"I'm not crazy about him myself. He asked us to take him into the Scouts and your father wants us to give him a chance."

"Father's too blamed tender hearted," growled Dal. "Don't pat a Hun pup with one hand unless you've got half a brick in the other."

"Maybe we can civilize him."

"Kill him first and be sure," advised the man coldly. "I know the breed. As for old Weinberg, he's vamoosed. But the funny part of the thing is, Dick, that he was in the crowd outside the gate last night and volunteered to help."

"It was a bluff."

"So I think. Another funny thing was that he was yelling about the fire being set and demanding that every one help him catch the man who set it. Said he'd be accused of it and that he wouldn't stand for that."

"Then why didn't he stick round and yell that way to-day? Gee, but I wish I could get out and help! I'll be able to in a couple of days."

"You'll sit here till your face grows to look less like a hard boiled soft-shell egg," observed Dal. "This is my own particular party. My men fell down and let 'em pull it off. They're some peevish,

and your Aunt Lizzies ain't adding to their peace of mind by what they're saying."

"It's mean to lay the blame on you," declared Dick.

"That's where it belongs," acknowledged Tregressor. "My men know it. I told 'em so twice. They said a third time wasn't necessary," he added. "Anyway, let the Lizzies have their fun. It doesn't hurt anything to keep a gang of fighting huskies mad."

"I couldn't stop 'em from here, anyway." He was silent for a moment. "Dal," he asked slowly, "has Jim Scott shown up anywhere in this?"

Tregressor's frown increased. "That's where we both fell down," he admitted, "fell down hard. We ought to have gone to Mr. Kendall with that story last night."

"I hate to believe it."

"Will you promise not to tell this, even to your father?"

"Of course."

"I went the rounds of that crowd outside the

fence last night and I asked a heap of questions. I wanted to find who was the first one on the spot and then if he's seen any one else. I drew a blank. Then one of my ivory-heads, who'd been on the north fence, came strolling up with the news that, just before the whistle blew, he'd seen some one running. Later he sorter remembered it looked like two some ones. The second looked like the man I described to him and that description fitted Scott."

"Why didn't he shoot? Oh, why didn't he shoot?"

"He's waiting in the office, with a state policeman on each side of him, to answer that question to Mr. Kendall, son."

"Do you suspect him of being mixed up in it?"

"I suspect every one but myself — and I'm getting uncertain about me. All I know is, I'm going to land Scott and Weinberg back in Kendallville, if I have to go to Berlin and get 'em."

With an effort, the boy sat up and held out his hand. "You can make all the fun of us you want," he said, "but we Lizzies aren't going to let the Ter-

riers go it alone. You've got to count us in, Dal. We're going to do our share and —" He stopped and looked up to find that it was his sister's step he had heard and that she was standing in the doorway. "If you tell me it's time to eat again, Sally," he declared, "I'll sic the cat on you."

"I knew I'd get my reward," exclaimed Dal in mock excitement; "it's afternoon tea."

The girl shook a finger at the big fellow. "If you want doughnuts," she said merrily, "you can come out in the kitchen and get them. Last time you said they weren't good."

"I didn't do anything of the sort; I merely suggested that the holes were too big."

"You said they looked like life preservers," she charged.

"Having been through the submarine zone, a life preserver looks good to me, Sally. I think they'd be safer if you'd bait 'em with a bit of cheese, though."

"You're always finding fault," she laughed. "Guess it's 'cause you weren't brought up right.

I'll have to speak to your father about it. He's out here and wants to see Dick."

"Why didn't you say so? Tell him to come in."

"The Weinberg boy's with him," she ventured.

Tregressor stiffened as his eyes met Dick's. "All right," said the latter quietly, "bring 'em both in."

"What's up?" queried Dal as the girl turned away.

"Can't guess. Oh, hello, Mr. Tregressor. It's mighty nice in you to come."

"Hello, Dick; hello, son. Well, well," he exclaimed, holding one of the lad's hands in both of his, "it's good to find you looking so fit. You had a close call last night, my boy, but you showed us all once again that you're made of the right sort of stuff. Oscar and I both want to tell you how proud we are of you."

Young Weinberg came to the side of the sofa and held out his hand. "I know I want to say that, Dick," he announced heartily, "I wish I had the nerve to do a thing like that."

Dal's eyes had not left Weinberg's face since he had come in, and his straightforward manner puzzled him. "Where's your father?" he demanded abruptly.

The boy turned slowly and his eyes met the searching gray ones. "I don't know," he admitted; "I wish I did. There're a lot of things I don't know that I'd like to."

Tregressor noted his father's quick movement, but checked the old man's attempt to interrupt. "What are some of 'em?" he queried.

Oscar was not slow in sensing the hostility in the air and he turned squarely on the man. "One of 'em is why you treat me as you do," he answered frankly. "You weren't born in this country; I was. But you seem to think that, because my father came from Germany, I'm a German. I'm more American than you are. But no one seems to want to give me a chance to prove it, that is, no one but Mr. Tregressor. He understands."

Whether Dick or Dal was the more surprised would be hard to say. The latter whistled softly,

but Dick settled against his pillows, his face resolute. In a flash, it had come over him how Oscar must have suffered in the past two days. The lad's expression was so open, his eyes so honest, that not for a moment could Dick question his honesty; he could only try to master his sympathy. If ever a boy knew what the sufferings of the misjudged were, it was Dick Hall.

"I've doubted you," he broke out impulsively; "I'm mighty sorry I've wronged you."

"You've been fair enough, Dick. You've always been square with me. You were square when you thrashed me that time. I deserved it; I was a bully. You cured me of that, and it was you who gave me a chance to get into the Scouts. I've wanted to join ever since they started. I can see what they mean here in Kendallville. I thought no one wanted me, until you sent me to Mr. Tregressor and he explained."

Dick knew his face was scarlet. He had tried to be generous with the boy, but now he knew he had fallen far short of the mark and it made him sud-

denly appear contemptible in his own eyes. But this was because he was over-generous and too young to appreciate that the best sort of victory for a boy to win is a single-handed victory over himself. And that was the sort of fight Oscar Weinberg had waged under old Mr. Tregressor's guiding hand.

It was Dal who spoke, however. "You said I wasn't an American," he charged. "You've a whole lot of new geography to learn, along with your other new lessons, young man. The United States and Canada have been different nations for some few years, but, from now on, you'll find 'em both American."

"I wasn't questioning you," broke in Oscar; "I'm kicking against your right to doubt me."

"I don't doubt you, youngster," retorted Dal.

"You doubt my father, don't you?"

"I didn't say so, did I?"

"You didn't have to. You've proved it, the way you've been hunting him all day. How'd you feel if the whole town was hunting your father?"

"Blamed uncomfortable."

"So do I," retorted the boy. "What's more, if there's anything really wrong, I'd be the first to find him, if I could. I don't believe I knew it till Mr. Tregressor talked with me; I guess I didn't understand what I am very well, till I heard him read that pledge to the flag and thought over the Scout oath and all it meant. Now I know. My country comes first. My country's plain United States."

"Then put it there," cried Dal, holding out his hand.

"Thanks." Oscar shook it solemnly and turned to Dick with a questioning glance. The other was as quick to extend his hand.

"Guess you and I'll pull rather close from now on, Oscar," he said.

"Won't be my fault if we don't, Dick."

The white-haired man smiled that gentle, friendly smile which was fast winning all Kendallville to his following, and, leaning back in the chair he had pulled close to the couch, looked at his own big boy. "Any time you feel inclined, Dal," he announced, his eyes twinkling, "you can go away from here.

We're going to talk about Boy Scouts, and once you refused to belong."

"If you're going to have one of your disagreeable moods, I will. But, Gov'nor," he went on, changing to unexpected earnestness," maybe the best of us make mistakes. I wasn't over-keen on this business when I came home. I thought youngsters had better drill and learn to be soldiers and then men. But I've seen you turn out one pretty fair sort of man in that bandaged mess there on the sofa, and it looks as if you'd made another mighty promising start with this young American eagle. It must be the Scouts. Pity they hadn't started when I was a kid."

The father's eyes met the son's and there was a wealth of both pride and love in them. "You're right about these boys," he admitted, "but I didn't make a great success with you. One has to have a few grains of modesty on which to build."

"About here," chuckled Dal, "is where I crawl into a deep dug-out and pull the roof in after me. I may never know much, but sometime I do hope

I will know enough not to joke with you, sir. As they say out West, boys, he's 'bad medicine.'"

Somehow or other the idea that even Mr. Tregressor could turn a smile in Dal's direction aroused all Dick's wealth of loyalty. He did not understand that the two men were trying to hide the deep affection which surged between them, or that both were trying royally to make Oscar Weinberg comfortable. "Dal's been mighty handy for me," he announced. "He's helped me with my signaling a lot. I'm getting to be quite the expert."

"Still more modesty!" groaned the big chap. "Now, Weinberg, you boast a bit and cover father's head with ashes."

"I'm afraid I've nothing much to be proud of," confessed the lad.

"Buck up and find something then," retorted Dal instantly. "A fellow never amounts to anything till he does."

"If there are to be any sermons to be preached, that's my field," broke in Mr. Tregressor. "You

can listen for a while, if you want. You say you're always willing to try anything once."

"Go ahead," ordered the son, "I'm done."

"Dick," began Mr. Tregressor, "Tom and Billy and Longshanks have gone already, and more of the Kendallville boys will go before the war's much older. They've left a big gap in their homes, and I imagine we've left a big gap in their hearts. All over the country there are other boys and other Kendallvilles. These boys who've gone to the colors have new interests, but the home interests will cling and they'll long for home news when they're thousands of miles away."

"You bet they will!" declared Dal. "You've sure said something this time, Gov'nor."

The old man nodded. "Oscar and I have been talking it over, along with a lot of things, and that's why we've come to see you, Dick. Oscar's going to be a Scout and a good Scout. Before this war's very much older I've an idea there'll be an entirely new feature in Scouting and Oscar wants to be among the first to take it up. It will be known,

wherever our army and navy goes as 'The Big Brothers.' Every Scout will have a Big Brother with the colors, and write him at least once a week."

"And right here's where I declare myself in on this," cried Dal Tregressor. "Oscar, you and I'll start a new patrol, and we'll be the Carrier Pigeons."

"No, you won't," contradicted Dick. "You'll both join the Beavers."

"But I'm not through," pleaded Mr. Tregressor. "Each Little Brother will have other privileges. He'll make it a point to visit the homes of the boys who have gone, and see what he can do to help there. In every way he'll try to take the place of the boy who has gone."

"Fine!" cried Dick. "Fine! Of course we'll do it. We'll be proud to."

Dal Tregressor rose impulsively and, striding to his father's side, laid his one good hand on the old shoulder. "I wish we were worthy of you," he said simply and walked out of the room.

CHAPTER XII

OUT OF THE AIR

In spite of the loyalty of his friends, who came to see him whenever they could find stray half hours, Dick would have found the next week dull, had it not been for Mr. Tregressor. The wise old man had proven a good judge of character, and now began to reap the reward for the gentle guidance he had given the unsuspecting lad. In their long talks, the spiritual side of the boy began to appear in a more certain light and he knew that Dick must ultimately develop into a vital force in Kendallville, and when that day came that he would be a living monument to the ideals of Scouting.

They talked much of the new "Big Brother" movement, laid many plans and drew up lists, but they also found time to delve still deeper into signaling, for now Dick could read the Morse code and

was learning to send with key, as well as flag. His burns healed slowly, but still slower was his recovery from the nervous shock. He confessed to Dal Tregressor that when that door crashed in, and the flames leaped toward him, he thought that the end had come.

Stephen Kendall, too, came to see him almost every day, and, in spite of his pleadings, refused to allow him to go back to work until he had completely recovered. In this Mr. Hall agreed, and, as Dick's pay went on, he had no grounds for complaint.

When he was able to be about for a few hours a day, Mr. Kendall turned over all the paper work of the Kendall Guard to him. It kept him occupied until he was strong enough to take part in the drills. Here his squad took it upon themselves to see that he did not over-do, trying their best to save him all that was possible, with the result that the youngsters were soon the stars of the company.

Of Dal Tregressor he saw not half as much as he wanted. A new and troubled expression had come into the depths of the frank eyes, and, at times,

the man was moody. The failure of his men on that night of the fire weighed more heavily on honest Dal than any one dreamed.

In his more drastic orders he had the backing of the Kendalls. Like him, they believed their plant was marked for destruction. The fact that Otto Weinberg was still among the missing, and with him Schwartz, and half a dozen others, did not add to their peace of mind. Certainly it brought Dal Tregressor no semblance of comfort. He would have given his other hand for ten seconds alone with Weinberg, for he was convinced that the German was at the root of the whole affair.

But what troubled them all, "Bullet" and Stephen Kendall in their confidential talks, Dal and Dick in their brief conferences, and the majority of the men in the factory, was the complete disappearance of Jim Scott. He had not been seen since Tregressor's guard had spied that second figure fleeing into the night.

Dick thought of Scott often during that first long week and still more often, when, following Dal's ad-

vice, he began to take long tramps in the country in order to build up his strength. Once or twice Mr. Tregressor went with him, and the boy learnt more and more about the wood-craft he had studied only in theory. Once or twice Oscar Weinberg was his companion, and both boys learned how an unexpected friendship can ripen into true comradeship in the great out-of-doors.

So passed another week and Dick, almost himself again, planned to return to work on Monday night. Sunday came clear and beautiful, an ideal day in the fields, and, after dinner, the boy slipped on his khaki and started for a final tramp. He stopped a moment at the Tregressors', but found Dal was at the factory, so decided to go alone.

He cleared the town with swinging strides, head up and drawing long breaths of the clear, fresh air. It was good to be in the open. As he came to the first broad fields, he began to whistle. There was pleasure even in the soft dust which puffed, in little clouds, under his hurrying feet. For he did hurry, not because anything was driving him, but because

something within him seemed to be calling, calling — urging him to make the most of this last hike and enjoy the afternoon to the full.

All of his old strength and spirits came back. He felt like a colt turned loose and started to run. Then came the temptation to try out to the full the value of the Scout step. Back into a steady heel and toe he dropped for fifty steps, then broke into a trot for another fifty, and alternated between them as he "ate up" the road. The pace did not tell on his strength. He kept at it for several miles.

Then a brook, bubbling down from the mountain which guarded the head of the valley, crossed the wooded road and proved too great a temptation to resist. Stealing through the brush, he crept to the edge of the bank, and lay flat on his stomach. The reward was worth the work. For twenty minutes he lay within three feet of that half pound trout, watching his slow moving fins.

It was cool and sweet by the brook. The idea came to follow it up into the mountain. Easy, at first, the going soon became harder. It would be

fun, and much easier, to guess at the course, cut corners and see if he had sized up the topography correctly. The new game was fascinating. It brought map making to his mind. He had heard Dal talk of that many times. He decided to map the brook for half a mile. And then he remembered that, while he had paper and pencil, he had no compass.

A moment later his laughter rang out clear. Of what use were all the things Mr. Tregressor had taught him, if he could not apply them in case of need? His watch and the sun gave him as good a compass as any one could ask. He went ahead more carefully now, jotting down notes as he clambered.

The brook began to get more ambitious. The climbing became harder. A ruffed grouse went up almost from between his feet and left him open-mouthed with surprise. He was tempted to follow its flight, and as he looked through the trees to the south, he caught a vista of the valley stretching away at his feet.

It was so peaceful, so beautiful, that he looked about for a better viewpoint. Above him, the rocks rose in a sharp cliff. He scaled it with some difficulty and found himself on a broad shelf, the whole valley open before him, the wooded crest of the mountain over his right shoulder. The view was the most entrancing he had ever seen. He sat down, his back against a bowlder, and drank it in with thirsty eyes.

It began to dawn upon him why he had never been there. Kendallville was really a long way off. Only a few of the houses showed, like white dots embroidered on a soft, green background. No one could dream, as he sat so far and so high above it, that any evil force threatened the peace of the town, or the factory which gave it life.

The longer he lay there in the sunshine, the further drifted his thoughts until they became those dreams of doing which every healthy boy has, but never tells. Again his eyes began to take in the details of the valley, and he saw what a wonderful station for a flag-man was this very spot on which

he sat. With a glass, Dal Tregressor, in the factory yard, could read any message he might wig-wag. Idly, his hands began to move in quick arcs. But it was too much exertion on such a lovely day. With a comfortable little sigh, he snuggled more comfortably against the rock and stretched his legs further in front of him.

Dreams gave place to oblivion. He came to with a shiver. Not only was it cold, but it was dark. With a quick gasp, he realized that he had slept the sun out of the sky and that he was alone, high on a strange mountain-side. If the climb had been hard, the descent would be harder. He sprang to his feet. Far to the south he saw the slender, sweeping beam of the searchlight Dal had had mounted on the roof of the new shop.

He was anything but afraid. He knew no one would worry at home because he failed to arrive in time for supper. His own difficulties were more real. That steep cliff he had had trouble in scaling in full day, would be far more difficult to descend in inky darkness.

Springing to his feet he walked to the edge. If he had been so foolish as to go to sleep in the sunshine, he would be game enough to pay the price of his laziness. But, as he peered over the edge into nothingness, it didn't look quite such a joke. He had a few matches in his pocket. He struck one and found the scars made by his knees in the dry dust where he had pulled himself up.

He lay down, and dropping his legs over the edge, clutched a crevice with his fingers as his toes searched for a hole. It didn't appear so easy to find. His teeth closed more tightly and his feet moved with growing caution. If he had made a mistake in picking his location, he might be in for a nasty fall. As he swayed, he raised his face to the mountain above him.

All at once his struggling ceased. Anxiety in his eyes gave place to wonder. His lips parted. His fingers grew cold as he gripped the rough rock. His throat felt dry, then a big lump came into it and his heart began to pump until his breath came in little, short gasps. Above him, and to the north where

he had noticed thick masses of spruce, a strange, blue-white spark gleamed, faded, gleamed and faded in vicious, piercing flashes.

Every muscle in his body tautened like steel wires. Without realizing it he pulled himself back onto the rock and flattened out on it like a stamp on an envelope, his eyes glued to the black spot where the blue light had been. It came again, regularly now, and, with a gasp, he realized that it meant something to him, that he, Dick Hall, was reading the Morse code aloud as it was flashed out into space, by what could only be a very real wireless set up in the open.

He knew his body was trembling but his brain was steady. Dot and dash and dot he could make out, but then some waving branch would come between his eyes and the spark and he would be forced to guess at the missing letters. But what he could piece out told him a story which made a shiver run down his spine. Weinberg and his crowd were a mystery no longer.

He pulled himself together, and, still flat on his

stomach, tried to think out what was best to do. If Dal Tregressor had only come with him! He entertained the idea of rushing back to Kendallville, rousing the Home Guard and factory guards and surrounding the mountain. Then came the realization that, if he arrived with such a wild story of a wireless on a lonely mountain-side, they would laugh at him and say it was but a continuation of his dreams. But he knew better than that. There was the spark again. It could not be far away. It was his duty to secure full evidence. Without giving his own danger a thought, he began to crawl slowly up, feeling each inch with his fingers, making every move with bated breath.

Five minutes and he thought he could hear the crackling hiss of the spark. The murmur of the spruce was too loud to permit the reading of the message. It was on his eyes alone he must rely — his eyes backed by the wood-craft Mr. Tregressor had taught the boys of the Beaver patrol.

Steadily, slowly, with a caution of which he had never before supposed himself capable, he got his

knee under him, then one foot, then the other. Like a shadow he writhed into the greater shadow of the big spruce. For a moment he waited, lest some noise he had not heard himself, might have been heard by others. Then he peered out. He could see nothing. Any moment the sending might stop. He must catch, and read, part of it; he must have a definite clew, no matter what the risk to himself. If they saw him, he could make a break down the mountainside. It would be a desperate race and the best man would win.

He stole to another tree, then to another and a third, always nearer to where he had last seen the flashes. Over and over he repeated the words he had picked up. "To-morrow night chosen. Al—" Then had come the break. He must know what came after that "al." Was everything "Already?" Were "All safe." One thing he never questioned. To-morrow night something was to happen at the Kendall factory. Every nerve within him told him that. But this time he fought in the dark and alone.

Then, of a sudden, the darkness was broken. Within thirty feet of him the blue spark crackled. He caught the code for "Repeat" before he could recover sufficiently from his astonishment at finding himself so near, to jump back to safety.

He knew some message had been received, knew that its sender had demanded that it be repeated back, so that there might be no mistake, knew that if he could catch it, it would be all he needed. Came the hiss of fast-sent dots and dashes. With every nerve strained, with every faculty alert, Dick Hall listened. "Destruction of plant vital. Blow —"

A great hand gripped the back of his neck and he was hurled to the ground with a crash. The next instant a heavy knee sank into his chest and he felt a cold, small circle pressing his temple. "Move and you're dead!" hissed a voice.

Then came a gruff startled cry, a grunted answer and the crash of running feet. The next moment a flash-light threw a silver ring among the trees. Dick gasped, gulped, then closed his eyes. Instinc-

tively he knew who it was who towered above him.

"Do it, you spy!" he challenged.

But Weinberg merely laughed contemptuously. "Bind him," he ordered.

CHAPTER XIII

THE WEAK LINK

NUMBED to the bone with the cold, he lay throughout the long night where they had bound him. Much he was sure of now; the rest he thought he could guess. But guessing was not his greatest problem. He must find some way to escape, some means of getting word back to Kendallville, some method of informing Stephen Kendall and Dal Tregressor that grave danger hovered close. Yet, roped hand and foot, unable to do more than roll like a log from side to side, he could find no ray of hope in the darkness which engulfed him.

What little thought he gave to himself was all of bewilderment. He could not understand Weinberg's attitude of indifference toward him. The least he had expected, as he went down, was a beating which should have left him insensible. Knowing his man, he could not fathom his neglect to settle his long-standing grudge.

At last the dawn drove the lazy stars out of the sky. Birds began to sing, as if only happiness and peace lay over the valley. The sun came up and again shadows spread through the spruce. From time to time, Dick heard the sound of voices. He could distinguish no words, but it was apparent that one man gave orders which the rest hurried to obey. He heard pounding, then the grunts of men lifting some heavy object. It came over him that the wireless apparatus was being dismantled and packed. Then he heard the thud of a pick and the scrape of a shovel. Afraid to risk carrying it away, the men were burying the outfit until, at some later day, it could be removed in safety. Its work was done.

It made him wild to be so helpless. If he could only see what was being done, where the thing was being hidden, he would be of some value. As it was, he was utterly useless. Here, almost within arm's reach of the heart of some grave plot, he was as valueless to all he held dear as were the sticks which jabbed him in the back and sides. Desperate, he tried to roll nearer the scene of their work.

He could make little progress. Trees and underbrush blocked him at every painful turn. The ropes cut into his wrists but he struggled with dogged courage. The idea of rolling in the direction of safety never occurred to him. His teachings, as well as his desire, all lay in the way of duty first.

A little slope gave him a quickly accepted chance. Over and over he rolled until he brought up with a bump against the stub of an ancient tree. Shock and surprise drew a smothered exclamation from him. It was enough. The next moment big Schwartz came leaping toward him. "Ach!" he growled, "Is it that you are yet curious?"

Dick, savage over his own carelessness, made no answer.

"What want you here?"

Still the boy was silent. For a moment, the man glared at him, puzzled. Then, with a shrug of his great shoulders, he swooped down, swung the trussed body onto his back and bore him to where a tiny shack stood, half concealed, in a thicket. Through the open door into the dark interior he

strode, then, tossing the lad into a corner, turned and slammed the door as he went out.

For a long time Dick did not move. No noise came to disturb him. All there was to do was to regret the mistake he had made in rolling so carelessly. It gave him small comfort. He knew his chances of doing anything to save the plant had diminished to almost nothing. He could see no way to free himself, no way to get past that closed door. Yet, if he could, what chance remained?

He lay there thinking, thinking. Becoming used to the dim light, his eyes could make out the vague form of rough rafters and rougher bunks against the walls. Apparently the shack had been used as a camp even before that night of the fire. He had a dim recollection of having heard it said that Weinberg and Schwartz were great walkers.

He traced back many loose threads to this common center. He knew now where the gang had disappeared. He tried to figure how they had set up their wireless, where its messages went, who sent the replies. But, as he thought, a new sensation

began to creep over him. He felt uncomfortable, as if some one were staring at him from out of the dark, as if there were some unseen enemy lurking there in the blackness. "Who's there?" he demanded sharply.

"Sh!" The warning came sharp and low. Dick's tight nerves tautened.

"Who are you?" he whispered.

"That you, Dick?"

"Yes. Who are you?"

"Scott."

The boy felt sudden nausea. It had been bad enough to suspect; it was far worse to have suspicion confirmed. Surely this plot was unfolding rapidly. Scott was out in the open at last; Scott, the man who tried to worm his way to friendship, the man who had tried to use a boy as a stool pigeon, the man who was willing to risk another's reputation in order to cover his own tracks. "Oh!" was his only answer. Yet it contained, far better than many words, the full measure of his repugnance.

"Don't be a fool!" came Scott's calm voice.

"They're all outside; they'll be back anytime. We've got to get together. You threw an awful scare into 'em last night. They think their trail's discovered. They're watching. Who was with you? Who's coming? How much do they know down at the plant?"

"Do you think I'll tell you anything?"

"Was Tregressor with you?"

Dick set his teeth. It took every ounce of his self-control to contain his desire to lash out at the man. Only his innate chivalry, and the fear of dropping some hint which might prove of value, kept him quiet.

"Don't be a fool!" exclaimed Scott desperately. "Your life isn't worth a cent here. Can't you see that we may be able to do together what we couldn't do alone?"

"I'm through talking. I'll take what's coming to me. What you get is up to you. I hope it's what you deserve."

"Quit thinking about yourself, you chump! There's more at stake than you and me. If we

don't break loose before night, the Kendall factory goes up in dust, and *then* who takes over those contracts, who makes the pistols you gave up going to the front to help make? I don't care what you think of me; I'm thinking of that factory."

"What changed you?" sneered the boy. "Getting ready to wish this on some one else, the way you put your stealing on me?"

He knew Scott's body stiffened. He felt, without being able to see, the change which came over the man, and, in the silence which followed his taunt, he regretted his words as unworthy of a man, even under extreme provocation. "I'm sorry I said that," he admitted. "I guess I'm thinking of it in a different way. I don't understand you. Let it go at that."

Scott paid scant attention to this awkward apology. His thoughts were too busy with more important things, and he weighed them very carefully. "I did steal from Weinberg's office," he stated. "The worst part of it was, Weinberg got suspicious next day. He had to put through his

bluff then. That's why I'm here. If I could have kept it on you there'd have been no danger now. He'd have been where he couldn't do any harm, he and Schwartz's whole gang."

"Schwartz's?" Dick's voice showed interest now.

"Sure! Weinberg's an underling. Schwartz is the main guy. It was his orders to Weinberg to tie up the plant with a strike that I stole."

"But why did you want 'em?"

"Because it's my business to get the evidence I'm ordered to get."

"What do you mean? Who are you?"

"I'm a poor simp who's overreached himself," he retorted with a grim laugh. "Before they caught me, that night of the fire, bound me and lugged me here, I thought I was a fairly clever Secret Service man."

"You!" Dick came over on his side with a twist. "You in the Secret Service? Oh, Jim, why didn't you tell me?"

His voice was so disconsolate, that, in spite of

their predicament, a smile played around the corners of Scott's mouth. "I wasn't advertising much," he answered. "Only Kendall knew why I was there. We'd tipped him off to look out, but had made him swear to keep still. Other plants are threatened. There's —" He stopped. "I'm talking too much," he said.

"That accounts for Sergeant Baker's having said he'd seen you," said the boy thoughtfully.

"The big boob!" exploded Jim. "He nearly queered my whole game. Sure he'd seen me! I helped clean up a gang he was after out West. Do you believe me now, youngster?"

"Down in my heart, I guess I've always believed in you. Only it wasn't like you to let me stand it all alone."

"Knew you'd do it quick enough, if you realized how big a service you were doing. I tried to square you with Kendall, but he said you didn't need my help. Told me to count on you. If we both weren't tied, I'd count on you a lot more," he added. "Suppose you tell me what you're doing here."

"Suppose it that you shut up," growled a voice, and, the next instant, big, square Schwartz strode through the door, followed by a dapper, firm-stepping stranger with a bristling blonde beard.

"Silence!" commanded the latter. "I will do the necessary questioning. You have muddled things sufficiently."

Schwartz wilted under the curt reprimand. Dick knew now whose intelligence was behind that wireless plant. The man stepped close to his side, and, stooping suddenly, jerked him to his feet. The strength in the close-knit body seemed almost superhuman. The blue eyes snapped as they settled on the boy's face.

"Pouf!" he said disgustedly. "An oaf, Schwartz. You and your curs are losing your courage. It's a boy."

"It's a clever boy," mumbled Schwartz.

"Silence! Weinberg!" he called.

The big man hurried in, his face flushed.

"Is this youngling of the Kendall force?"

"Yes, sir."

"Important to us?"

"He is the favorite of Kendall the Younger. He may know much."

"Doesn't look it." The man's contempt was an evident trick to enrage the lad. Dick didn't need Scott's short laugh to warn him. The man spun on his heel. "From you enough," he snapped. "Your present position tells its own tale of your intelligence."

"You're a long way from home yet," retorted Jim coldly.

"That is my affair."

"We've one thing in common," grunted Scott. "When do I eat?"

"Swine!"

He turned back to the boy. "How did you come here?" he shot out.

"Walked."

"Is it possible! Are you much given to walking over the property of other people?"

"If I'm trespassing on yours, take me into court."

"You're apt to go elsewhere, my pert young

friend. Keep a civil tongue in your head and answer me as I should be answered."

"He hasn't got a gun," observed Scott sorrowfully.

"From you, enough. More, and the gag shall be replaced."

"Make it food and go as far as you like," suggested Scott carelessly. "You won't get much satisfaction out of that kid."

Dick, quick to recognize that the clash between these two men was of long standing, marveled at Scott's nerve. For a helpless man, he took desperate chances. Dick could be as game. As he faced his questioner, Dal Tregressor's motto for the Beaver patrol flashed across his mind. Scott was living up to that very thing and doing it against fearful odds. He, too, could face odds with a laugh.

"How many men guard the Kendall factory at night?" The question cracked out like a shot and a strong hand gripped the boy's wrists and bent his arms upward until the pain became sharp.

"Going to try torturing me, are you? It won't get you anywhere."

"We'll test that." The arms were pushed higher. "How many?"

"Quit that and I'll tell."

Scott gasped, but an exclamation of triumph came from the man. "Quick!" he ordered.

"Well, let me make sure," began the boy, as if counting. "There's the popcorn man with his popper, a couple of kids with tin swords and,—oh, enough to beat you up, all right."

"Swine!" An angry palm slapped the boy full in the mouth. "Have you searched him?" he demanded, whirling on Schwartz.

"No."

"Why not?" There was no mistaking his anger. "Do it."

Both Weinberg and Schwartz leaped to the work. In a moment Dick's pockets were inside out. The contents were more varied than interesting. It was the leader himself who swooped down on a bit of paper in the heap. Smoothing it, he strode nearer

the door, his face black as he studied it. "Who made this map?" he challenged.

"What map?"

"Of the approach by way of the stream."

Dick remembered the game he had played on the previous afternoon. "Oh, that!" he said.

"Yes, that."

"Good, isn't it? We all carry those."

"Who's 'we'?"

"Why," answered Dick innocently, "maybe a lot of fools like me; maybe the fifty or so men around the foot of the mountain."

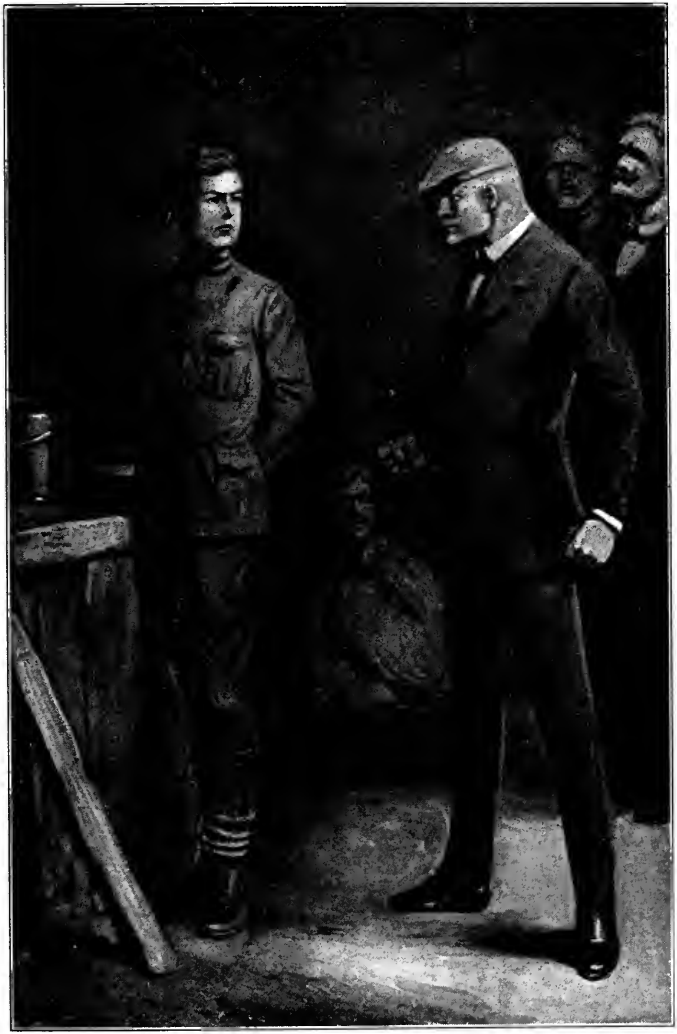
"That's a lie," stated the man, tearing the page to bits and tossing them through the doorway. "There are no men down there."

"All right, there are not."

"Which do you mean?"

"Well," said Dick slowly, "it's about like this. You'll say I'm lying anyway. Take your choice."

Again the man's palm caught the boy across the mouth. It was all Dick could do to control himself.



"THE BOY'S EYES NEVER FALTERED"

He heard Scott heave at the ropes which bound him. "See here," the boy exclaimed coldly, "you can go on slamming me around till your arms ache, but it won't get you anywhere. You've got a lot to learn about Americans; one thing is, we don't squeal."

The man stepped closer, his fist drawn back. But the boy's eyes never faltered as they held his, and it was the tormentor who was the first to speak. "I'd test that, if I had time," he growled.

"You'll be given the time," declared Scott; "there are about a hundred million people going to see to that. Quit bluffing! it hasn't gotten you anywhere yet."

"Put them both out of the way," growled Schwartz.

"No," voted Weinberg. "We should leave no trail behind us."

"Silence!" growled the angry man. "I know my business. This grit of theirs shall stand a little test. They shall be left here, bound, to converse about their courage until hunger brings them face to

face with silence. Some day they may be found. They will tell no tales then."

"What!" Scott's voice was sharp with incredulity. He grasped the whole diabolical plan, knew how small a chance there was of any one's finding them, knew what their sufferings would be as they lay there dying from hunger and thirst. Dick's face, too, was white. "It's better than having to stay here with them, Jim," he said. "You ought to hear Oscar Weinberg talk about his father."

The shot in the air reached its mark. Dick saw the big man wince, but, before he could speak again, the leader gave him a shove and sent him reeling into a bunk. "Out!" he ordered. "We have much yet to do and these two have ceased to amuse me."

"We're a long way from down and out," Jim Scott called after him, "though what I could do to a beefsteak is a shame. Well," he added, as the door closed with a violent bang, "looks like we were in for a social time, Dickie."

"Do you think they'll really leave us here to starve?"

"That's the least of their troubles," retorted Scott soberly. "We're in for it good and plenty, unless some one comes."

All at once Dick's face brightened. "Some one will," he declared. "I'd almost forgotten the Beavers. They, and the other Scouts, will find us. They'll never give up."

"Hope you're right," confessed Scott; "I'm counting more on you and me, though. We'll get away some how. I've been in a heap of tight corners and there's always a weak link in every crook's game."

"But we've got to get out of this before night. We've got to get word to Stephen Kendall."

"We'll do it, all right."

"How?"

"You ask me one question at a time, Dickie. But we'll do it."

"We'll try," agreed the boy sturdily. "We can at least try."

"Wish they hadn't taken your knife."

"Wouldn't do much good, when our hands are tied."

"How are your teeth on a long chew?"

"Good enough to risk," answered Dick. "But they might come back and catch me. That would spoil that chance."

"That's so," agreed Jim. "Can't pull old stuff on this crowd, I guess; they're too wise."

Dick was thoughtful for a long time. "Jim," he asked at last, "one of us might not get through, if we do get a start. I don't know enough about their plans to tell much. Do you?"

"I know that they've made a couple of infernal machines which they expect to pass into the factory to-night. Two of their crowd are still there."

"Who are they?"

"Don't know. One thing they've been almighty careful about, and that's *names*. I don't even know the name of that chap who slammed you around."

"We've got to get to the village ahead of them,"

declared the boy; "we've got to warn Dal Tregressor."

"Sure, but how?"

"I don't know," he sighed; "I wish I did but I don't. The Scouts are about our only hope."

Scott didn't have even that hope, but his more experienced mind was active. Their conversation lagged, died out. Both worked out plan after plan in silence, only to reject each one as impossible. Slowly the day dragged on and their need became more pressing as their hope became less.

Twice during the afternoon Weinberg came into the hut, only to go out again without speaking. None of the others came back. It was evident to Scott that the gang planned to travel light in their get-away. Given a few hours start, they would be comparatively safe. Once in a big city, it would be difficult to pick up their trail.

It was almost dark when Schwartz finally put in an appearance. In silence, he went to a corner, carefully removed much loose dirt from the lid of a buried box, and lifted out two square objects which

he handled with great tenderness. As he carried them toward the door, he stopped an instant beside Scott. "One time," he sneered, "you make me salute the flag of you. This time it is I who will make a little salute."

"Hope it kills you," snarled Scott, beside himself at last.

Schwartz kicked him contemptuously, then laughed as he walked out. "Listen well for our salute," he said. "But it is you who are to die."

"Roll over here, Dick." Scott's voice was tense now and the boy came out of the bunk with a crash. "Come close. Get your wrists near my mouth."

"My teeth are stronger, Jim."

"Obey. We've no time to lose. They're going down the mountain."

The boy hitched himself across the floor without a word. He trusted the man implicitly now. He wiggled around until he felt Scott's face on his hands. The next moment came sharp tugs at the rope which bound him. Then Scott settled down to steady, desperate gnawing.

Both were so intent on the well-nigh hopeless task that they did not hear the door when it was pushed softly open, nor the quick step on the dirt floor. "What is it that proceeds here?" It was Weinberg.

With a groan, Scott's head fell back. "It's all up!" he gasped.

"It's *not*." Dick's voice rang true and courageous. It was as if he had just begun to fight.

Weinberg stooped and rolled the boy into the center of the floor. "What is it," he asked in a low voice, "that my son says of his father?"

"He's a decent boy; he's through with you."

"Ach!" It was sheer pain which drew that exclamation from the father. "What knows he of duty?"

"He said he'd give you up, if he knew where you were. That's his idea of duty to his country."

"Duty is to obey. Tell him that the father of him sent that message."

"Swell chance we've got to deliver any last messages," exclaimed Scott. "I won't insult an honest

kid by giving him any messages from the likes of you."

"I am the father of him; you do not comprehend."

"Blamed glad I've no son to apologize to."

"I make no apology; it is that I but explain my duty. It is you, Hall, who will take to Oscar that word."

"If I ever see him again, I'll tell him."

"You shall see him." He straightened, and, drawing a knife from his pocket opened it and tossed it into a bunk. "There is the opportunity for you," he said. "The hours it shall take to work you free, gives to us safety. That I pay for your explanations to my son. I run now that I may not be missed." With that, he turned and lumbered out into the gathering dusk.

"Crooked, even to his own gang!" sneered Scott.

"It's the first decent thing he ever did," contradicted Dick, already wiggling toward that knife.

CHAPTER XIV

STEPHEN KENDALL SPEAKS

It was Sally Hall who, beside herself with anxiety, had rushed down to the factory yard at midnight, in search of Dal Tregressor. "Dick!" she panted. "Something's happened to Dick! We haven't seen him since noon. He always tells father when he's going to be late. He's been hurt!"

"Guess not," replied Dal cheerfully. "He's able to take care of himself." Many things flashed through the big fellow's brain. "Where have you looked?"

"Everywhere. No one's seen him."

"Who's with him?"

"No one, as near as we can find out. He started for a walk. We don't even know which way he went. And he isn't strong. Oh, something's happened to him, I know something's happened to him! Father thinks so, too."

Dal bit his lip. If Tom Hall was worried; there

was good cause for others to be afraid. Knowing that Mr. Hall was familiar with much that had happened, Dal's own mind was not slow in coming to a conclusion. "The best thing you can do," he said kindly, "is to go home and tell your father everything's all right, because we people are going to get right on the job. We'll have Dick home before you get there. Now run; I'm going to see Mr. Kendall."

"Will he help find Dick?"

"Don't think he'll do much else till he has found him. We're all mighty fond of that kid down here. Want me to send some one home with you?"

"No thanks."

"And you'll go straight home, Sally?"

"Yes," she promised valiantly. "If you say you'll find Dick, you will."

"You bet we will!" But if she could have seen his face as he ran into Stephen Kendall's office, her fear would have grown to terror.

Dal told his story in mighty few words. "And I don't believe any lad my father's taught woodcraft

has been lost or hurt," he finished. "He's disappeared because he's been made to disappear. It's the Weinberg gang. They've got it in for him."

"Sooner this thing's forced to a finish, the better," snapped Kendall. "I'm through waiting; I'm going to take the fight to them. Nothing's going to happen to that boy."

"Not as long as I've a fight left in me," echoed Dal. "What are the orders?"

"Hunt for him. Some one must have seen him yesterday afternoon. Round up the railway station and other places in town. If you don't get track of him, come back. One of my machines will be here by then. Drive over the roads to the south; I'm going north."

"How about the other ways?"

"Rout out North on your way up town. He'll take care of the state road east; there's nothing westward. Dick went either up or down the valley. I'm sure of that."

"All right. Get word back, if you find him or want help."

"I'll telephone here whenever I can find an instrument. Do the same."

"Good." Dal wheeled and rushed out. But dawn came, and with it, no good news. At seven o'clock, Stephen Kendall, dusty and hollow-eyed, drove up to the factory. Twenty minutes later Tregressor, too, returned, baffled but not discouraged.

"My men want to go out and hunt," he announced. "The kid's — oh, well," he finished gruffly, "they feel about the way we do toward him."

"Let half go. If it's a trap, we can't afford to be caught unguarded."

"How about the Aunt Lizzies?"

"North's getting them out. But, Dal, none of these men can do more than ask questions. We've got to organize this."

"How about the Boy Scouts?"

"Will your father —"

"Watch that whole outfit," broke in Dal. "Let me take a car till I get them started."

But that work was saved him. Mr. Tregressor

had heard the news. Even before he had gone over to see Tom Hall, he had sent word to Jimmie Farnsworth. "Bullet" Kendall himself changed the request to an order and every Scout in his employ was told to report to the scoutmaster. Dal found the front yard full of lads in khaki, but they were a quiet, sober-faced lot who realized that each passing hour added to their responsibility.

He had expected to play some part in assigning them to their work, but his advice was not asked and he saw his aid was not needed. Mr. Tregressor's only instructions, as he sent them out in squads of twos and threes, were, "Find Dick!" How they should do it, was a part of that schooling now being put to such a severe test.

It was Farnsworth, with Nick Root as his assistant, who was assigned to the eastern side of the upper valley road. They went out of the town resolved to stay out until Dick was found.

Nick, with his characteristic impulsiveness, was all for making a break and getting ahead of the slow-working searchers from the factory and Ken-

dall Guards, but Jimmie insisted on thoroughness, fearful lest some important clew be overlooked and Dick's peril increased. The boy was certain that his friend had fallen and broken a leg. "He'd have come home before now, if he hadn't," he stated. "Don't believe one busted leg would have stopped him, either. Probably both are smashed."

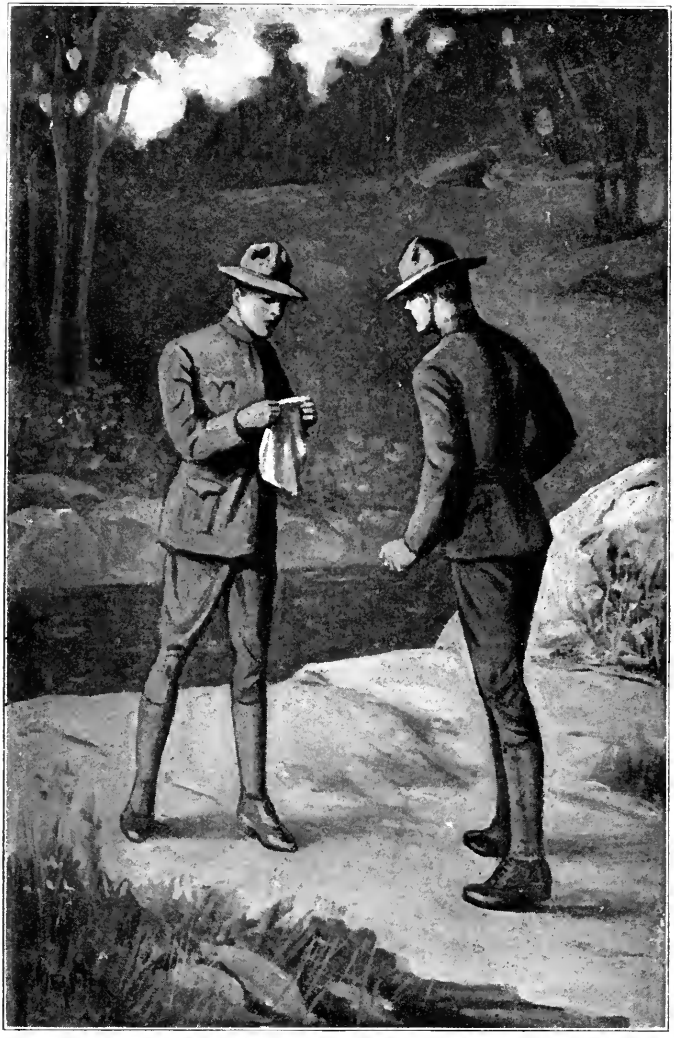
"How we goin' to carry him back, then?"

"Dunno. Let's find him first. I'm going into that farm house and ask again."

"You've been there twice."

"I'd go there fifty times, if I thought I could learn anything."

It was with that sort of thoroughness that Jimmie Farnsworth worked his way out along the valley road. Time after time they separated, to hunt in groves and fields for some sign of Dick's trail. Often, when far apart, they stopped to wigwag messages of defeat or encouragement to each other; often they wondered if some of the other Scouts were meeting with better success, but never did they cease their search. They had been ordered to find



"THEY FOUND THEIR REWARD FOR THOROUGHNESS"

Dick Hall, and they would keep at it until they did, or received word that some one else had had that good fortune.

Many times they saw one of the Kendall machines dashing along the road. Once Mr. Tregressor came out to give his boys words of encouragement; twice they saw big Dal in a rushing car.

Mile after mile they covered, zig-zagging this way and that, running far afield and questioning every one. Later in the afternoon tired men began to go townward, but the boys gritted their teeth and stuck to their work. And, by the brook at the foot of the mountain, they found their reward for thoroughness. When Dick had decided to creep up to peek at that trout, he had lost his handkerchief. It was Nick who pounced on it.

"Look! Look!" he cried excitedly. "See the 'Hall' on it, Jim."

"It's his, all right," gulped Farnsworth. "He's somewhere up there."

"It's getting dark."

"I know it."

"We better go on."

"Wait a second, I want to think. See here, Nick," he went on, after a minute, "we've got the trail; that's the most important thing."

"'Tisn't. We want Dick."

"We got to use our heads now. He may be way up top; he's probably hurt bad. It might be night when we found him. We need help; we've got to get it. If we got lost, it wouldn't do Dick a bit of good."

"That's so," admitted Nick sorrowfully. "I'd rather go up but —"

"So'd I," agreed Jim instantly, "but we got to consider what's best. I can run farther'n you. You stay here. I'm going for Dal Tregressor."

"All right," sighed little Nick; "'course I will. But I'd like to go."

"Sure you would! But we're workin' for Dick."

"Get started!" growled the little chap. "It's gettin' dark."

And, while Nick Root sat by that brook, and Jimmie Farnsworth sped for help at the top of his

speed, high up on the mountain the boy they thought half dead was working with the fury of a cornered tiger.

How Dick freed Jim's hands with the knife he held between his teeth, neither of them ever knew. It was a question of saving the seconds and forgetting the cuts. Free at last, they faced a new difficulty. Scott, long tied, was so stiff and sore that he could barely stand. "You've got to go it alone," he stated. "I'll follow somehow — but go, go as you never went before! It's all up to you — plant, men, everything."

For a moment Dick's own aching hand clasped that of his friend. "It's up to me," he agreed steadily, and stumbled out.

Each step hurt. The muscles, which should have been so full of spring, kinked and faltered. He dared not run for fear of falling. He risked an instant's rest against the trunk of a spruce. The blood was pounding in his ears, and he was faint from lack of food and thirsty beyond belief.

Such things he must forget. The fate of the

Kendall shops rested in his hands. It was a time to test both grit and courage to the limit. He was a Scout and a Hall. He was prepared and he could not fail. For him, the mountain-side was pathless. His only direction lay downward. Somewhere below, ran the road to Kendallville; and somewhere below six desperate men were marching toward that same highway.

Starting at as fast a walk as he could manage, he hoped, at the end of those first fifty painful steps, to be able to break into a trot. The Scout's pace had served well, the day before. Would it now be the means of saving Kendallville?

Twice his leaden feet caught in exposed roots and threw him headlong. As he rose the second time, he heard a crash farther above. Scott was also stumbling down the mountain. It gave him new courage and he began to run. The woods thickened. Twice he had to fight through tangled masses of underbrush. His legs felt better and hope rose. A drink from that brook, and he would be himself again.

To the right, he thought he saw a path. He took the chance of added steps and found a trail. It wound downward, offering better footing and he increased his pace, heedless of all but time.

A startled challenge broke the silence. There was no mistaking Schwartz's voice. He had run into their rear guard. Without stopping to weigh the result, he wheeled to the left and went crashing into the woods, making no attempt at anything but speed. A pistol barked. To the right, he heard the spat of a bullet against a tree. He was playing hide and seek with death in the dark woods. He ran for his own life as well as the lives of others.

Came the second shot. This time he heard the whine of the bullet. Quick shouts rang out. From the noise, he judged that one man followed him. A second would try to head him off. He thought of Scott. What if he, too, was working to the south. One of them must get through. "Jim!" he shouted at the top of his voice. "I'm going south."

There came no answer. He knew Scott was too

canny to risk one. All that he heard was the crash of his pursuer. The man was gaining. Dick tried to run faster. His tongue was a great, dry lump in his burning mouth. His breath seared his throat. For a moment, the noise behind him grew fainter. Then, once more, the man began to gain.

Now the woods seemed strangely familiar. The footing was better, he risked changing his course a trifle. Down-hill work was easier. From behind, came that steady pound, pound, of the feet which bore his fate. Then, like a bomb, open sky and vast space burst in his face. He was on the edge of that cliff.

Far, far away, he saw the lights of Kendallville. If he failed now, they went out. His head went back and his eyes grew very wide. The distant lights faded from his sight. He had gone through much, but, now, as he faced the crisis, he knew he could face still more. For this he had stayed behind. This was his "bit." He leaped.

Why he was not killed, none who examined the place, in weeks to come, could explain. But, Dick,

even as he lay stunned and shaken knew. His first remembrance was of a fusillade from the cliff above, the crash of bullets against rocks and trees, the bellowings of a man who dared not follow, but fired as he hunted a safe descent.

Again he struggled to his feet. To his vague amazement, his body felt still intact. He started downward at little better than a crawl, leaning now against a friendly trunk, now on some cool rock. Above, the man still shouted. From his own right came less distinct replies.

He came to the brook. Throwing himself full length, he buried his battered face in the icy water. Twice he took deep gulps, then stopped. Thirsty as he was, he remembered Mr. Tregressor's warning against too deep draughts when there was work to be done. He rose and started straight down. From here he knew the way. His map was burned on his memory and he recognized indistinct landmarks. The road was less than a quarter of a mile away. Once on the highway and he could make better time. He wondered how things were

with Scott. Even the night seemed brighter. His steps hurt less and less. His ankle burned strangely but that, too, would be better. Once he thought he heard voices, but they were far away. He had won the start which meant safety for the factory. Once warned, good old Dal would see to the rest.

Ahead, he thought he heard the tumble of the waterfall into that pool where he had watched the trout. He was almost out. Remembering the thicket through which he had crept, he turned sharply to the left. A light was flashed into his eyes. He heard a sharp exclamation, but, head down, he went in, still ready to prove his metal.

But this time he fought proved steel. A hand grasped his shoulder. "What do you think you're trying to do?"

"Dal! Dal!" The cry was half sob.

"Who else? Nice scare you've given us. Thought something crooked was up. Thought Weinberg —"

"He has. They're there. Wait! Listen!" He gulped out his story in short, panting sentences

and Tregressor guessed more than the boy told. A new expression came over his face, an expression Dick would not have recognized, even could he have seen it — the fighting look of a man who knows what a desperate fight means.

"Come," he commanded abruptly; "you've done your bit; I'll carry on." He rushed Dick back to the road. "Douse those lights!" he ordered.

"Who's with you, Dal?"

"Steve Kendall and a pair of Scouts."

"Have you found him, Dal?"

"Yes, and more. Start that car."

It was Stephen Kendall who lifted the lad into the big machine, but it was Tregressor who did the explaining. "Scott's still in there," he finished. "I know what'll happen, if they get him. Get Dick back to the village."

"No." It was Dick who spoke. "I'm going to see this through."

"No, you're not, youngster," contradicted Stephen Kendall, with a queer catch in his voice; "you're going home with Jim and Nick. North will drive

you. You've done your part like a man."

"And a soldier," added Dal Tregressor. "Come on, Steve, old son. Our work's up there above."

"Let's get at it, then." Stephen's voice was as gay as Dal's, yet both knew what they went to face.

But from neither of them could any one ever drag the story of that fight in the dark.

Dick, steadied by a night's sleep, did his best to make both tell, when they came to see him. "Dal was the one who found Scott," said Kendall.

"Sure he's all right? You're not fooling me?"

"'Course not."

"Thanks. But after you found him?"

"We were all right. We knew where we were," said Mr. Kendall.

"*You* did," corrected Tregressor. "You're a wonder! I never saw better nerve."

"But how did you capture them all?" insisted the boy. "Father says Weinberg's dead and that chap who slapped me, badly wounded."

"Then let him tell you the rest," growled Dal; "I'm trying to forget it."

"Gee!" sighed the youngster. "But I wish I had the courage of you two!"

"Umph! Where'd you pack any more? Before I forget it, father asked me to tell you he's sending in a recommendation to have them give you the Scout Medal of Honor."

"The medal? For me!" exclaimed Dick.

"Why not? Guess you saved quite a few lives last night. Thinking of offering you a little reward myself," Dal added, realizing the need of giving the lad time to recover; "don't know but I'll give you a job with my Terriers. The Aunt Lizzies don't half appreciate you."

"Suppose you let me offer the job at the plant," suggested Mr. Kendall; "Dick's coming into my office to learn the business."

"Stephen!" It was the first time that Tom Hall, seated in his invalid's chair, close to Dick, had spoken, and now his eyes were bright with tears.

" He's certainly won the chance, Tom, and he'll make good."

" But I've only done my duty, sir," stammered the delighted boy.

" What more can any man do, Dick? " asked Dal Tregressor soberly.

THE END

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